

LIVES AND LEGENDS OF THE GEORGIAN SAINTS

Selected and Translated
from the original texts

by

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Dedicated with Respect
to
HIS HOLINESS DAVID V
(Devdariani)
Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia

PREFACE

THOUGH numerically insignificant—probably little more than four million strong—the Georgians of the Caucasus have a Christian culture dating back over sixteen hundred years, and a civilization reaching back to the era of Jason and the Golden Fleece. Today, they constitute one of the most individualistic peoples of the Soviet Union. In addition, several hundred thousand of them live within the frontiers of Turkey, and have been largely assimilated by Islam.

The history of the autocephalous Church of Georgia is long and eventful. Its earliest head, following the conversion of Georgia by Saint Nino, was Archbishop John I, whose pontificate lasted from 335 to 363. According to tradition, the Georgian Catholicosate was established by King Vakhtang Gorgaslan, the first Georgian Catholicos being Peter I (467-474). Following the Council of Chalcedon (451), the Georgians followed the Armenians into the Monophysite camp, but rejoined the Orthodox fold in 607 under Archbishop Kyrion I. From the time of Tavpechagh II (649-664) to Peter II (689-720), the Georgian Catholicos-Patriarchs were married. Originally, they were consecrated by the Patriarchs of Antioch, but this ceased with John III (744-760).

During the Middle Ages, from the thirteenth to the early nineteenth century, there existed a separate Catholicosate of Western Georgia, with its seat at Bichvinta, and later, at Gelati. This situation reflected the division of the Georgian monarchy of the Bagratids, following the Mongol invasion.

The principal Georgian Catholicosate of Mtskheta remained in being until after the Russian annexation of 1801. But in 1811, the autocephaly of the Georgian Church was arbitrarily abolished by the Holy Synod of St. Petersburg. Catholicos Antoni II was deposed, and a series of Russian-appointed Exarchs nominated, right up to the 1917 Revolution. One of these, Archbishop Nikon Sofitsky, was murdered in Tbilisi in 1908.

Following the February Revolution of 1917, the Georgian bishops proclaimed the re-establishment of their Church's autocephaly, and elected as their Catholicos-Patriarch the outstanding Church leader Kyrion III Sadzaglishvili, who was murdered in the following year. Catholicos Ambrose (1921-27) protested against the Soviet annexation of Georgia, and was imprisoned after a political show trial. Catholicos Callistrates (1932-52), an outstanding leader, was subjected to vilification and abuse by the infamous Beria, and by the 'League of Militant Godless' headed by Emelyan Yaroslavsky.

The autocephaly of the Georgian Church was recognized by the Moscow Patriarchate, at Stalin's behest, in 1943. By then, it ceased to present any threat to the Communist regime. Of the 2,455 Georgian churches of the pre-1917 period, only about one hundred are operating in our time, including eleven in the capital city of Tbilisi.

The Georgian Catholicos is a constituent member of the World Council of Churches. However, official Soviet statistics show that only nine of the fifteen Georgian episcopal and archiepiscopal sees were occupied in 1974. In four cases, the diocese was being administered either by the Catholicos himself, or by a neighbouring bishop. The only seminary for priests, at Mtskheta-Samtavro, houses no more than a dozen

novices, living in poor conditions with few facilities for systematic theological studies.

The venerable Church of Georgia deserves our prayers. Its glorious past is evoked by Professor Lang's collection of lives of Saints, in English translation. Originally published for a specialized public of Orientalists, the book is now reprinted with corrections in a more accessible form, and is recommended to those interested in the history of the Eastern Orthodox Churches.

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CONTENTS

PREFACE <i>Gareth Evans</i>	<i>page</i> 5
INTRODUCTION	11
I St. Nino and the Conversion of Georgia	13
II The Nine Martyred Children of Kola	40
III A Martyred Princess : The Passion of St. Shushanik	44
IV A Militant Ascetic : Peter the Iberian, Bishop of Mayuma by Gaza	57
V A Forerunner of St. Francis : David of Garesja	81
VI The Passion of St. Eustace the Cobbler	94
VII The Martyrdom of Abo, the Perfumer from Baghdad	115
VIII Gregory of Khandzta and the Georgian National Revival	134
IX The Georgian Athonites	154
X The Passion of Queen Ketevan	169
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	173
INDEX	175



INTRODUCTION

'Georgia is called Mother of the Saints; some of these have been inhabitants of this land, while others came among us from time to time from foreign parts to testify to the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

Passion of St. Abo.

ANYONE who has glanced at the old chronicles which tell the story of the Crusades will have met references to the Georgians or Iberians, described as a Christian nation living in the Caucasus between the Black Sea and the Caspian, close to the Saracens and the Tartars, and near the land of Gog and Magog. About the year 1180, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Jacques de Vitry, wrote: 'There is also in the East another Christian people, who are very warlike and valiant in battle, being strong in body and powerful in the countless numbers of their warriors. They are much dreaded by the Saracens and have often by their invasions done great damage to the Persians, Medes and Assyrians on whose borders they dwell, being entirely surrounded by infidel nations. These men are called Georgians, because they especially revere and worship St. George, whom they make their patron and standard-bearer in their fight with the infidels, and they honour him above all other saints. Whenever they come on pilgrimage to the Lord's Sepulchre, they march into the Holy City with banners displayed, without paying tribute to anyone, for the Saracens dare in no wise molest them. They wear their hair and beards about a cubit long and have hats on their heads.'

A similar tribute is paid to the Georgians by the medieval Arab writer al-'Umari, who describes the army of the Georgians as 'the kernel of the religion of the Cross,' adding that the Mameluke Sultans of Egypt used

to address the Georgian king as 'the great monarch, the hero, the bold, just to his subjects, the successor of the Greek kings, protector of the homeland of the knights, supporter of the faith of Jesus, the anointed leader of Christian heroes, the best of close companions, and the friend of kings and sultans.'

This should surely be enough to fire our interest in this valiant people of the Christian East, whose patron saint is our own St. George of England. The Georgian Church traces its history through sixteen centuries to the time of Constantine the Great. During all this time, it has been a bastion of Christianity in the Orient. Indeed, the Church in Georgia was not only the centre of religious faith, but of national life itself. It was in the lives of its saints that the aspirations of the Georgian nation found their earliest literary expression.

The Georgian Church has many points of affinity with that of our own country. It cleaves to the doctrine formulated at Nicæa and Chalcedon. The liturgy is celebrated in the national tongue. Its spiritual and devotional ideals differ little from our own. Even under the present Communist régime, Georgia retains its own Catholicos-Patriarch as spiritual head, and enjoys autocephaly or independent status within the Orthodox communion.

Our aim here is to give readers in the West an impression of the history and ideals of the Georgian Church as revealed in the lives of its saints. The wording of the original texts has been respected throughout, except that in many cases a measure of condensation has been unavoidable to bring this volume into the range of the present series.

CHAPTER I

ST. NINO AND THE CONVERSION OF GEORGIA

THE story of St. Nino, for all its fabulous embellishments, is built on a solid foundation of fact. History, archæology and national tradition are unanimous in affirming that Iberia, as Eastern Georgia was then called, adopted Christianity as its state religion about A.D. 330, in the time of Constantine the Great.

At this period, the Roman Empire exercised suzerainty over the neighbouring state of Armenia, where Christianity had lately triumphed as a result of the mission of St. Gregory the Illuminator. We should also recall that by St. Nino's time Western Georgia, comprising the provinces of Colchis, Abkhazia and Lazica, had already been evangelized by missionaries active in the Greek colonies along the Black Sea coast. The Council of Nicæa in the year 325 was attended by bishops from Trebizond, the principal sea-port of Lazica, and from Bichvinta, the strategic port and Metropolitan See situated on the borders of Colchis and Abkhazia. It thus becomes clear that political conditions strongly favoured the conversion of Eastern Georgia to Christianity, the new official creed of the Romans.

The biography of St. Nino as we have it today is made up of a number of elements of varying authenticity. The basis of our knowledge of the saint's personality and mission is contained in a chapter of the church history by Rufinus, composed about the year A.D. 403. This

chapter is based on oral information given to Rufinus by a Georgian prince named Bakur whom he met in Palestine about the year 395. This Bakur was a member of the royal house of Iberia, and was telling of events which had occurred little more than half a century earlier, during the lifetime of his own parents or at least his grandparents. When due allowance is made for the pious raptures of Rufinus and his informant, there is no reason to challenge the essential accuracy of their joint account.

This is more than can be said for the other legends which gathered round the saint in the course of ages. About the 8th-9th centuries, the Armenian writer known as the pseudo-Moses of Khorene combined the story of St. Nino according to Rufinus (as known to him through the Armenian version of the church history of Socrates of Constantinople) with the story of the conversion of Armenia by Ripsime and Gregory the Illuminator, as related by Agathangelos. This artificial fusion of the stories of St. Nino and of Ripsime defies chronology and represents, to use uncanonical language, a red herring trailed across the path of historical analysis.

Once the process of elaboration and embroidering had begun, there was no limit to the fantasy of Nino's later pious biographers. This saintly woman, originally described as a simple slave girl, is now transformed into a niece of the Patriarch Juvenal of Jerusalem (who lived a full century after Nino's time), or, in other variants, into a Roman princess. Incidents belonging to the reign of Diocletian are transposed into that of Constantine to permit of Nino being portrayed as one of the virgins accompanying Ripsime to Armenia; there Nino is supposed to have been miraculously preserved from the martyrdom which overtook her companions at the hands of King Tiridates. Special interest attaches to the references to the True Cross and to the Coat of our Saviour,

which was supposed to have been rescued by the Jews of Georgia and preserved there after the Crucifixion. It is possible that this legend has a basis in the ancient traditions of the Jewish community in Georgia, and that the Christian faith had its adepts within this colony even before Nino's mission.

In the pages which follow, the passage from Rufinus which forms the nucleus of all later accounts of St. Nino's mission is given first in its entirety. This is succeeded by episodes from the later Georgian biographies of St. Nino, which assumed their definitive shape in the 10th-11th centuries. For the complete cycle of lives of St. Nino, reference should be made to the classic work, *The Life of Saint Nino* by Marjory and Oliver Wardrop, which appeared in 1900 as volume 5 of the Clarendon Press series *Studia Biblica et Ecclesiastica*.

Extract from the HISTORIA ECCLESIASTICA
of Tyrannius Rufinus

Book I, chapter 10: *On the Conversion of the Iberian People, brought about by a captive woman.*

At that time also the Iberian nation, who live in the clime of Pontus, accepted the laws of God's word and faith in the kingdom of heaven. This so excellent deed was brought about by a certain captive woman who had fallen among them, and who led a life of faith and complete sobriety and virtue, and throughout the days and nights unceasingly offered up prayers to God. The very novelty of this thing began to amaze the barbarians, and they diligently enquired what it meant. She told them simply the truth of the matter, namely that she was wont thus to worship Christ her God. The strangeness of this name seemed to the barbarians the most astonishing feature of the whole business. As often happens, however, her very persistence aroused among the womenfolk

a certain curiosity to see whether such devotion might not win some reward.

It is said to be a custom among them that if a child falls ill, it is carried round by its mother to each individual household, so that if anyone knows of some trustworthy remedy, he may administer it to the sufferer. Accordingly, when a certain woman had carried her ailing child to everyone, as the custom was, but without finding any cure in all the homes she had visited, she came at last to the captive woman so that she too might declare anything she knew of. The captive woman affirmed that she knew of no human remedy, but assured the mother that her God Christ, whom she worshipped, could grant the child that deliverance of which men had lost hope. Placing the infant on her hair cloak and furthermore offering up a prayer to the Lord, the captive woman then gave back the child cured to its mother.

The report of this spread to many, and the renown of the marvellous deed reached the ears of the queen who, being afflicted by some very grave bodily complaint, was in the greatest desperation. She asked for the captive woman to be brought to her. The latter, however, declined to go, lest she should seem to diverge from the retiring way of life fitting to her sex. Then the queen commanded them to carry her to the captive's cell. After laying her likewise on her hair cloak and calling on Christ's name, the captive woman raised her up immediately after the prayer in good health and spirits. She taught the queen that Christ, Son of God Almighty, was the Deity who had bestowed this cure on her, and that she should invoke Him, whom she ought to acknowledge as the source of her life and health. For it is He who distributes kingdoms to kings, and life to mortal men. And the queen, returning joyfully homewards, in answer to her husband's enquiry revealed the source of her

sudden restoration to health. But when in his joy at his wife's recovery, he ordered presents to be sent to the woman, the queen said, 'O King, the captive woman prizes none of these things. She rejects gold, despises silver and nourishes herself by fasting as if by food. The only way in which we can reward her is by worshipping that God Christ who cured me according to her prayer.'

At that time, the king paid no attention to this and put the matter off, although his wife often recalled it to his mind. At length one day while he was hunting in the forest with his retainers, the light of day was clouded over with dense murk and disappeared in the horror of pitch-black night, making it impossible to proceed. His companions dispersed in various directions and lost their way, and he remained alone enveloped in impenetrable gloom, without knowing what to do or where to turn. Suddenly his spirit, tormented by despair of being rescued, was lit up by a thought: 'If indeed that Christ whom the captive had preached to his wife was God, then let Him now deliver him from this darkness, that he too might forsake all other gods to worship Him.' And forthwith, as soon as he had made this vow in thought alone, and before he had time to express it in words, the light of day was restored to the world, and led the king unharmed to the city.

Revealing immediately to the queen what had occurred, he summons the captive woman, bidding her instruct him in the ritual of worship, and affirming that he would from now on venerate no other god but Christ. The captive woman appears, and preaches Christ the Lord, expounding the rites of prayer and the form of worship, in so far as these could properly be known to a woman. In addition, she tells them to build a church, and describes its shape.

The king accordingly summoned together all the folk

of his nation, and related the events which had happened to him and the queen from the very beginning. He instructed them in the faith and, albeit himself not yet initiated into the sacraments, became the apostle of his own nation. The men believed thanks to the king, the women thanks to the queen, and with a single mind they set to work to build a church. The surrounding walls were quickly erected, and the time came to set up the columns. When the first and second pillars had been raised, and they proceeded to lift the third, they employed all forms of machinery and the strength of oxen and men, but when it had been elevated to a slanting angle, it proved impossible by any manner of effort to raise it the rest of the way. The redoubled and often repeated efforts of all the men failed to move it from its position, and everyone was reduced to exhaustion. The whole people was seized with astonishment, and the king's resolution began to fail him. Nobody knew what was to be done.

But when at nightfall everyone went away, and both the toilers and their toil fell into repose, the captive woman remained alone on the spot and passed the whole night in prayer. And behold, when the king and all his people arrived full of anxiety in the morning, he saw the column, which so many machines and so many men could not shift, standing upright and freely suspended above its pedestal—not set upon it, but hanging in the air about a foot above. As soon as the whole people witnessed this, they glorified God and began to declare this to be a proof of the truth of the king's faith and the religion of the captive woman. And behold, while they were all paralysed with amazement, the pillar slowly descended on to its base before their eyes, without anyone touching it, and settled in perfect balance. After this, the rest of the columns were erected with such ease that the remainder were all set in place that same day.

After the church had been built with due magnificence, the people were zealously yearning for God's faith. So an embassy is sent on behalf of the entire nation to the Emperor Constantine, in accordance with the captive woman's advice. The foregoing events are related to him, and a petition submitted, requesting that priests be sent to complete the work which God had begun. Sending them on their way amidst rejoicing and ceremony, the Emperor was far more glad at this news than if he had annexed to the Roman Empire peoples and realms unknown.

These happenings were related to us by Bacurius, a most trustworthy man, himself king of that very nation, and commander of the Guards in our court (who was most scrupulous about religion and truth), at the time when he resided with us at Jerusalem on cordial terms, being then in command of the frontiers of Palestine.

From the Georgian LIFE OF SAINT NINO

The Conversion of King Mirian, and of all Georgia with him, by our holy and blessed Mother, the Apostle Nino.

(Her festival is celebrated on January the 14th)

Let us relate the story of our holy and blessed Mother, the enlightener of all Georgia, Nino the apostle, as she herself told it on her death-bed to the believer Salome of Ujarma, daughter-in-law of King Mirian.

At the time when St. George of Cappadocia bore witness for Christ's sake, there lived in the same city of Cappadocia a certain man who was the saint's friend and companion, a true believer and a man of power and eminence, and his name was Zabulon. And this Zabulon set out for Rome to serve King Maximian and win honour and renown.

In those same days, there lived in Colastra a man who

had two children, a son named Juvenal and a daughter called Susanna. Then he and his wife died, leaving the brother and sister as orphans. These children departed and settled in the holy city of Jerusalem, having faith in the hope of all Christians, the holy Resurrection. Susanna's brother Juvenal obtained the office of steward, while she served the venerable Sarah of Bethlehem.

Meanwhile Zabulon the Cappadocian, whom we have mentioned above, arrived in the presence of the Emperor at the time when the Franks had rebelled against the Romans. Then God gave power invincible to Zabulon, who went forth with countless hosts against the Franks and put them to flight, capturing their king and all his chieftains.

After this, Zabulon resolved to go to Jerusalem, and when he arrived there he shared his treasures among the poor as God enjoins. He met Juvenal, who had become Patriarch, and Zabulon and the Patriarch became good friends. One day Sarah of Bethlehem said to the Patriarch, 'Since this Zabulon is a man full of wisdom and constant in God's service, give him your sister Susanna as his wife.' And the Patriarch followed Sarah's advice and married his sister to Zabulon, and they had a daughter who was St. Nino, the enlightener of Georgia. She was their only child, and her mother brought her up in the service of the poor, and she was diligent in the study of God's faith.

In those days a certain noble lady came from the city of Ephesus to worship at the holy places of Jerusalem. When she had offered up prayers, she made ready to return into her own country. But in the night the Holy Mother of God appeared to Nino in a vision and said to her, 'Depart into the land of the north and preach the gospel of my Son, and I will guide and protect you.' But she answered in alarm, 'Queen, how may I accomplish

this? For I am a worthless and ignorant woman.' Then the Holy Queen stretched out her hand upon a vine-branch which grew close to Nino's bed and cut it off and fashioned it into a cross and gave it to Nino, saying, 'Let this be your protection. By it, you may overcome all your foes and preach your message. I will be with you and not abandon you.'

After this vision, Nino awoke and found the cross in her hands. When morning came, she went out and told all this to the Patriarch and showed him the cross, and the Patriarch gave thanks to God. Then Nino begged the Patriarch to send her with the noble lady who was leaving for Ephesus. So she received the Patriarch's blessing, and set off in company with the noble lady. And when they arrived in Ephesus, Nino encountered there a certain royal princess, Ripsime by name, and her foster-mother Gaiane. They were living in a nunnery and longing to confess Christ.

At that time, the Emperor Diocletian sent forth to find a fair and virtuous bride who would make him a worthy consort. When his envoys came to the convent of virgins, they saw Ripsime and learnt that she was of royal blood. They were much impressed by her beauty, and drew a portrait of her on wood to send to the Emperor. When the Emperor saw it, he was greatly charmed and made up his mind to wed her in a ceremony of great magnificence.

When the blessed Ripsime and Gaiane and the other nuns saw the temptation that beset them, they remembered their vows of chastity. They inflicted on themselves severe penance, and secretly fled from the country. Crossing the sea in their flight, Ripsime, Gaiane, Nino and a number of other maidens with them reached the borders of Armenia, the realm of King Tiridates. When Tiridates saw Ripsime, he was seized with passion, and

resolved to take her as his wife. Since Ripsime refused, he martyred her, together with Gaiane her foster-mother, and many other maidens with them; and we know of the miracles which were performed at the time of their Passion, which by God's providence resulted in the conversion of the Armenians, including King Tiri-dates himself.

But some of these holy women escaped, among whom was St. Nino, who hid in a wild-rose bush which had not yet flowered. Afterwards Nino departed and came to the mountains of Javakheti, where there was a great lake called Lake Paravani. When Nino reached this place, and saw the mountains to the north covered in snow, and felt how cold the air was, she trembled and exclaimed, 'O God, receive my spirit!' There she remained for two days, begging food from some fishermen who were catching fish in the lake. There were also shepherds here. While they looked after their flocks at night, they used to call for help upon their gods, who were called Armazi and Zaden, and promise to offer up sacrifices to them if their affairs prospered. So Nino spoke to one of the shepherds, and asked him what region he came from. He replied, 'We are from the great city of Mtskheta, where these gods hold sway and the kings reign.' St. Nino asked them where the city of Mtskheta was situated, and they replied, 'Mtskheta lies on the river which flows out of this lake.'

When St. Nino saw how fearsome was the length of the road and how terrible were the mountains she was afraid. So she lifted her eyes up to heaven and begged for the help of God on high, who looks after us all. Then she set forth and reached the other side of the river, where it flows towards the west. On the road she encountered many troublesome obstacles, including terrifying wild beasts, until at last she reached the spot where the

river starts flowing towards the east. There she was encouraged by meeting with some travellers, in whose company she arrived at the outskirts of a town called Urbnisi. Here she saw strange gods being worshipped, and a cult being paid to fire, stones and wood. This much distressed St. Nino. She went into the quarter where the Jews lived, and talked to them in Hebrew, which she knew well. She stayed there a month, and learnt the ways and habits of that country.

One day a crowd of people set out from the town to go shopping in the great city of Mtskheta and offer sacrifices to their god Armazi. St. Nino went with them, and when they had got to the city of Mtskheta they stopped by the Bridge of the Magi. When St. Nino observed the sorcerers, fire-worshippers and seducers of the people, she wept over their sad fate and grieved for their strange customs. On the next day there was a loud noise of trumpets and a fearful uproar of shouting, and mobs of people as countless as the flowers of the field, who were rushing and jostling as they waited for the king and queen to come forth.

First came Queen Nana and then King Mirian, terrible and in great splendour. Nino asked a certain Jewish woman what all this meant. She answered that it was their custom to go up into the presence of their supreme god, who was unlike any other idol. When St. Nino heard this, she climbed up with the people to see the idol called Armazi, and placed herself near it in a crevice in the rock. There was a great noise, and the king and all the people quaked with fear before the image. Nino saw the standing figure of a man made of copper. His body was clothed in a golden coat of armour, and he had a gold helmet on his head. His shoulder-pieces and eyes were made from emeralds and beryl stones. In his hand he held a sword as bright as a lightning flash, which turned

round in his grasp, and nobody dared touch the idol on pain of death.

They proclaimed, 'If there is anyone here who despises the glory of the great god Armazi, or sides with those Hebrews who ignore the priests of sun-worship or worship a certain strange deity who is the Son of the God of Heaven—if any of these evil persons are among us, let them be struck down by the sword of him who is feared by all the world.'

When they had spoken these words, they all worshipped the idol in fear and trembling. On its right there stood another image, made of gold, with the face of a man. Its name was Gatsi, and to the left of it was a silver idol with a human face, the name of which was Gaim. These were the gods of the Georgian people.

When the blessed Nino saw this, she began to sigh towards God and shed tears because of the errors of this northern land, for the light was hidden from its people and the reign of darkness enclosed them. She lifted up her eyes to heaven and said, 'O God, by Thy great might throw down these enemies of Thine, and make this people wise by Thy great mercy, so that the whole nation may worship the only God through the power of Jesus Christ Thy Son, to whom belong praise and thanks for evermore.'

After St. Nino had uttered this prayer, God immediately sent winds and hurricanes out of the west, with clouds sinister and grim in appearance. The noisy roar of thunder was heard, and at sunset a wind blew with a fetid and unpleasant smell. When the crowd saw this, they ran away as fast as they could towards their homes in the city. God granted them but little time, and when they were all safely home, His anger burst fiercely out from the sinister cloud. Hail fell in lumps as big as two fists on to the abode of the idols, and smashed them into

little pieces. The walls were destroyed by the terrible gale, and thrown down among the rocks. But Nino remained unharmed, watching from the same spot where she had stood at the beginning.

Three days later she got up, crossed the River Kura, and found outside the walls of the city a bramble bush growing in the shape of a small tent. She made a cross of vine-shoots and stayed there to pray. While she was living there, St. Nino often visited the Jewish quarter to converse in Hebrew, and to find out where the Lord's Tunic was kept, because she had heard in Jerusalem how it had been carried away by the Jews of Mtskheta, who would know where it was. She met there a certain Jewish priest called Abiathar, and his daughter Sidonia, to whom she preached the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. They accepted it and became her disciples, as well as six other Jewish women whom Nino taught.

The following is the account of this same priest Abiathar concerning the Tunic of our Lord Jesus Christ :

'At the time when Herod ruled in Jerusalem, there was a rumour that the Persians had captured Jerusalem. Because of this, there was sorrow and mourning among the Georgian Jews living in Mtskheta, the priests of Bodbe, the scribes at Kodi Spring and the interpreters of the law in Khoba. All of them wanted to go to the aid of the Holy City. But a few days later another messenger arrived with the cheering news that the Persians had not come to capture Jerusalem. Instead of weapons they were carrying royal gold, myrrh which quickly heals wounds, and fragrant incense. They were looking for a certain infant of the seed of David, born of a virgin. Then it transpired that they had found this child born of a virgin, who had been delivered unexpectedly, in a place unsuitable, as sometimes happens to people on a journey far from home. They came to the infant and worshipped

him, and offered him their gifts and went away in peace. The Georgian Jews were delighted to hear this news.

'Thirty years had passed by after this when Annas the high-priest wrote from Jerusalem as follows to my ancestor Elio^z—He to whom the kings of Persia came to bring gifts has grown up to manhood. He calls Himself the son of God. Come here to be present at His execution, which will fulfil the law of God and Moses.

'So Elio^z of Mtskheta went with Longinos of Karsani to be present at Christ's Crucifixion. And when they were nailing our Lord on the Cross at Jerusalem, and the executioner was driving in the nails with an iron hammer, Elio^z's mother in Mtskheta heard the blows and suddenly cried out—Farewell, kingdom of the Jews, for you have killed your Saviour and Liberator. Henceforth you will be deemed the enemies and murderers of your Creator. Woe is me, because I am not already buried before His death.—When she had spoken these words, she expired.

'Our Lord's Tunic fell by lot to the Jews of Mtskheta, and Elio^z took it to that city. His sister greeted him with tears and threw her arms round his neck. She took the garment of Jesus and pressed it to her bosom, and immediately departed this life. The cause of her death was threefold: bitter sorrow at the killing of Christ, grief for her mother's death, and regret that her brother had been an associate of those who denied our Saviour.

'This event caused a great sensation in Mtskheta and reached the ears of King Aderc himself. Everyone, including the princes and King Aderc, tried to take possession of the garment. But the monarch was overcome with fright and alarm when he found that he could not draw it from her arms. So firmly did she fold the garment to her breast that her brother Elio^z buried it with her.

'Many years later the great-nephew of King Aderc, King Armazael, looked for the Tunic among the Jews, but failed to discover it or to learn anything about it, except that it was said to be buried near a cedar of Lebanon. But the family of Elioz knew that it was to the east of the city, by the bridge of the Magi.'

Meanwhile, St. Nino prayed unceasingly in her retreat in the bramble bush. Her prayers and vigils astonished the pagan folk, and they began to ask her questions. So she explained to them the books of the Old and New Testaments, giving wisdom to the foolish and imbuing their hearts with the love of Christ.

In the course of three years' preaching she made many converts. Now there was a young boy belonging to a noble family who was dangerously ill, and his mother took him from door to door to see whether she could find anyone with the gift of healing to afford help in her trouble. But no one could heal the lad, and the doctors told the woman that her son could never be cured. This woman was a hardened pagan who detested the Christian faith and prevented other people from going to consult St. Nino. Now in her despair she came and fell down at Nino's feet, imploring her to cure the child. St. Nino said, 'I am ignorant of human arts of healing. But the Lord Christ whom I serve can heal the child even if everyone thinks his condition is hopeless.' Then she placed the sick boy on the mat upon which she always prayed, and began to intercede with Christ, and the lad was restored to health. She handed back the amazed and happy boy to his mother, who was filled with belief in Christ, declaring, 'There is no god but Christ, whom Nino preaches.' And she became a disciple of Nino and went away giving praise to God.

Then Queen Nana fell ill of a severe and painful disease which nobody could heal. All the skilful physi-

cians tried every one of their medicines, but without success. They told Queen Nana how this Roman slave girl, who was called Nino, had cured many sick people by her prayers. So she ordered her servants to bring Nino to her. They went and found her kneeling at prayer in the arbour under the bramble bush, and it was six o'clock. They told her the queen's command, to which Nino answered, 'I have no authority to leave my humble tent. Let the queen come here to my dwelling, and she will surely be healed by Christ's power.' The servants reported Nino's words to the queen, and carried her forth on her couch, accompanied by her son Rev and a crowd of people. When they came to St. Nino's abode, they set the queen upon her mat. Nino prayed and besought God for a long time, and then took her cross and touched the queen's head, feet and shoulders, making the sign of the cross. Immediately she recovered and got up in perfect health. And she confessed Christ saying, 'There is no God besides Christ whom this slave girl preaches.' Henceforth she became Nino's friend, and came to know the True God.

When the king enquired how it was that she had been cured so rapidly, she told him everything, namely how she had been healed without medicine, by the touch of a cross. The crowds who had seen it confirmed the queen's story, so that King Mirian was filled with amazement and began to look for the faith of Christ. Now in the Book of Nimrod, which King Mirian possessed, he read the story of the building of the tower, when Nimrod heard a voice from heaven saying, 'I am Michael, appointed by God to be commander of the east. In future times a King will come from heaven to be a despised member of a despised race. But the terror of His name will put an end to worldly pleasures. Kings will forsake their realms to seek for poverty. He will heed

you in your sorrow and deliver you.' Then Mirian saw that the evidence of the Old and New Testaments was confirmed by the Book of Nimrod.

One summer day, being Saturday, the 20th of July, the king went on a hunting trip towards Mukhran. Then that invisible enemy the devil tempted him by reviving in his heart the love of fire-worship and of idols. So the king said to four of his advisers, 'We have behaved unworthily towards our gods by being idle in their service and letting these Christian magicians preach their doctrine in this country, for their miracles are operated by sorcery. I have now decided to destroy all these believers in the cross unless they agree to serve the victorious gods of Georgia. I shall urge my wife Nana to repent and abandon her faith in the cross. If not, I shall forget my love for her, and she shall perish with the others.' His companions, who were strongly prejudiced on this question, applauded his decision.

The king had now passed the outskirts of Mukhran and arrived at the lofty hill of Tkhoti, from which he could see Caspi and Uplis-tsikhe. When he had reached the top and it was mid-day, the sun was obscured and it became as black as perpetual night. The region was enveloped in darkness and the members of the party lost touch with one another. The monarch was left by himself, anxious and afraid. He wandered about on the densely wooded hills until in his fear and anxiety he stood still in one place, losing all hope of being rescued. Then he began to muse, and said to himself, 'After all, I have called on my own gods and found no comfort. Now I wonder whether the Crucified One whom Nino preaches could save me from my plight? Light up this darkness for me, O God of Nino, and I will confess Thy name! I will set up a wooden cross and worship it, and build a place to pray in, and obey Nino and accept the faith of the Romans.'

After he had uttered these words it became light, and the sun shone down in all its splendour. Then the king got down from his horse and stretched out his arms to the east towards heaven, saying, 'Thou art God above all gods, Lord above all lords, O Deity whom Nino proclaims. Now I know that Thou desirest my salvation, and I rejoice, blessed Lord, to come near unto Thee. I will set up a cross upon this spot, so that Thy name may be praised and this marvel commemorated for ever.' So he marked the place and departed, and Queen Nana and all the people came out to welcome the king home.

At this time, Nino was in her bramble bush occupied with her regular evening prayers, together with a congregation of fifty people. When the king arrived there was a great stir in the city, and the king cried with a loud voice, 'Where is this woman from a far land, who is our mother, and whose God has saved us?' When he heard that she was praying in the thicket, he went with all his followers to see her, and said to Nino, 'I have now become worthy to invoke your God, who has saved me.' So St. Nino gave him instruction and told him to kneel down facing the east and confess Christ, the Son of God. The people trembled and wept for joy at the marvel which had taken place.

The next day, King Mirian sent envoys to Greece to the Emperor Constantine, together with a letter from Nino to Queen Helena, relating the miracles which had been done in Mtskheta and begging them to send priests to baptize them. Meanwhile Nino and her disciples preached day and night to the people, guiding them in the true path towards the kingdom of heaven. Before the priests arrived, the king said to St. Nino, 'I would like to build a house of God without delay. Where shall we erect it?' Nino replied, 'Wherever the king desires.' The king answered, 'I feel a fondness for this bush of yours,

and would prefer to have it there. And I shall not spare the treasures of my royal garden, neither the lofty cedars, the fruitful branches nor the fragrant flowers, but I will myself build a church to pray there, which may last for ever.'

So they brought timber and started building. They cut down the cedar tree and carved out a pillar from it, and they laid the church's foundations upon the roots of the tree. And the pillar was fearsome and marvellous to look at. Then the builders tried to erect it into its place, but they could not shift it. The king arrived with a great number of men, but powerful machines, great force and the efforts of all the people made no impression on it. The king and everybody else were astounded and exclaimed, 'What can this mean?' When night fell, the king went home very crestfallen.

St. Nino and twelve women from among her followers stayed by the pillar and wept. Then Nino arose and stretched out her arms in prayer to God, and said, 'May this project on which the king is engaged not be brought to nothing.' When dawn approached, the women fell asleep, but Nino stood with upraised hands. Suddenly there appeared by her a young man adorned with brilliant light and shrouded in fire. He spoke three words to her, at which she fell down upon her face. Then the youth touched the pillar with his hand and raised it, and it stood up. And the pillar blazed like a column of fire, and moved by itself to approach its base. Then it stood twelve cubits above its pedestal, which had been carved for it out of the stump of that same cedar tree from which this Living Pillar was hewn out.

At dawn the king got up in a mood of depression, and went to look at the garden and at the church which he had started to build with so much enthusiasm. Shooting up towards heaven from his garden he saw a light like a

flash of lightning. He came running to the spot with all his followers and the townspeople who had also observed the marvel. Then the column, resplendent with light, descended on to its place as if from heaven, and stood firmly on its base without being touched by human hands. Joyful was the moment when this occurred! The city of Mtskheta was filled with awe and happiness, and the citizens shed streams of tears, and blessed St. Nino for the great marvels which were done on that day.

Meanwhile, when King Mirian's envoys arrived in the presence of the Emperor Constantine and told him what had happened, the sovereign and his mother, Queen Helena, were overjoyed—firstly, because all Georgia was about to be baptized by their agency at a time when the grace of God was shining into all parts of the world, and secondly, because they imagined that King Mirian would destroy the Persians. So they received the ambassadors with love, and praised and thanked God, and sent the faithful priest, Bishop John, accompanied by two priests and three deacons. The emperor wrote a letter full of prayers and blessings to Mirian, and sent him a cross, an icon of our Saviour, and many presents. Queen Helena wrote Nino a letter of praise and encouragement.

When the bishop, priests and envoys arrived in Mtskheta, the king and all the people were filled with happiness, for they were anxious to be baptized. Then Mirian promptly sent out orders that all the dukes, generals and citizens of his realm should be summoned to him, and they all came to the city without delay. The king was baptized by the hand of St. Nino and then the queen and their children by the priests and deacons. They blessed the river Kura, and the bishop set apart a spot near the gate of the Bridge of the Magi, near the house of Elioz the priest, and the members of the aristocracy were baptized there. So the place was called

'Mtavart Sanatlo,' which means, 'The place where the princes received baptism.' At two places lower down the same river, the two priests and the deacons were baptizing the crowds of people, who were struggling to be the first to receive baptism, for they had heard Nino declare, 'No one who is not baptized will find that light eternal.' So they all received baptism, except for the clansmen of the Caucasus mountains. As for the latter, although the light shone upon them, they remained for some time obdurate in their darkness.

Then King Mirian sent Bishop John with some influential citizens to the Emperor Constantine to beg for a piece of the Wood of Life which at that time had been discovered by Queen Helena, the servant and lover of Christ. He also asked that a number of priests might be sent to baptize the people in all towns and districts, so that every soul in Georgia might receive baptism, and furthermore that masons be sent to build churches.

When they arrived in the presence of Constantine, he gladly presented them with parts of the Wood of Life, namely the beams to which our Lord's feet were nailed, and the nails which had pierced His hands. He also sent priests and many masons, and gave rich treasures to Bishop John, commanding that he should build churches in the first Georgian towns they reached on their return. So when they arrived at the place which is called Erusheti, the carpenters stopped there to build a church, in which they deposited the treasure and the nails by which our Lord's hands were pierced. Afterwards they went on to Manglisi and started building a church in which they placed the beams to which our Lord's feet were nailed.

Now King Mirian was angry that they did not come straight to his capital, but had begun to build churches in other towns and places, and had left the relics there. But Nino came and said to him, 'Do not be offended, O

king. Wherever they go, they are spreading God's name. After all, is Christ's glorious robe not preserved in this city?"

Then the king summoned Abiathar and many of the other Jews and made enquiries about the Tunic, and they told him all that is written above. Then King Mirian raised his hands, exclaiming, 'Blessed art Thou, Jesus, Son of the Living God, for Thou didst from the beginning desire to save us from Satan and from hell. Therefore Thy Holy Garment was brought from Thy Holy City of Jerusalem by these Hebrews who deny Thy Godhead, and belong to a race alien to us.'

Now when the king and queen were baptized with their children and all the people, there stood on the crest of a remote crag a tree of wondrous beauty and sweet scent. It was a miracle-working tree, for wild animals wounded by arrows used to come to it and eat its leaves or its seeds which had fallen to the ground, after which they were healed, even if they had suffered fatal wounds.

The common folk, who had previously been pagan, considered this a great marvel, so they told Bishop John about the tree. And the bishop said, 'Behold, this tree has been planted by God specially for this occasion. Now that the grace of God has shone forth upon Georgia, from this tree shall be carved the holy cross which all the multitudes of Georgia shall adore.' Then Rev, the king's son, went with the bishop and many of the people and cut down the tree, and a hundred men carried it to the city with all its branches and leaves. The people collected to see it, because of the fresh green leaves which it had at a time when all other trees were bare. Its foliage had not fallen and it was sweet-smelling and beautiful to look at. They stood the tree up on its base at the southern door of the church, where the breezes wafted its fragrant scent about and unfolded its leaves. There

the tree stood for thirty-seven days, and its leaves did not change colour. It looked as if it was standing immersed from root to topmost twig in a stream, and remained thus until all the trees of the forest were clothed in verdure, and the fruit trees were in blossom. Then on the first of May they fashioned three crosses from it, and on the seventh they raised them up in the king's presence amid popular rejoicing on the part of the crowds gathered in the church.

Soon afterwards, the people of the city saw a fiery cross come down from heaven. Round about it was what appeared like a crown of stars. The cross of fire rested on the church until dawn. When daylight came, two of the stars separated from the others—one going eastwards and the other towards the west. The brighter of the two went gently towards a spot near a stream on the far side of the river Aragvi, and stood over the rocky hill out of which a rivulet had sprung from the tears of Nino. From there the star rose up to heaven. They asked the blessed Nino, 'What is the meaning of these bright stars, one of which has gone eastwards towards the mountains of Kakheti, and the other to the western outskirts of this city?' St. Nino answered, 'When you have found where the stars are shining over those hills, there let two crosses be raised to Christ.' The king acted accordingly, and men went to inspect the highest mountains, one after another. Some went to the west, where they climbed the hill called Cavern's Head. These men reported to the king that one star had parted company from the others to take up a position over Mount Tkhoti by the pass of Caspi, after which it was lost to their sight. Similarly, those who had been sent to the hills of Kakheti returned to tell how they had seen a star move in that direction and stand over the village of Bodbe in the district of Kakheti.

Then St. Nino said to them, 'Take two of these crosses, and raise one in Tkhoti where God revealed His power. Give one to Christ's handmaiden Salome to be erected in the town of Ujarma. The village of Bodbe in Kakheti should not be given preference over the royal city of Ujarma, where there are great numbers of people, but Bodbe also shall later witness God's grace.' So they did as Nino directed.

In Mtskheta also they raised the wonder-working holy cross, and they went down to the stream which flows past the mound, and there they passed the night praying to God. Next day, the countless multitude knelt and worshipped the cross, and confessed the Crucified to be the True Son of the Living God, and they believed in God Almighty, Three in One. And on Easter Sunday, King Mirian and all Mtskheta offered up prayers and thanksgiving. On that day they instituted the service of the Cross at Easter, which is observed throughout Georgia to this day. And many pagans in distress were healed by the cross, a number of whom were baptized and gave cheerful praise to God. Diseases of various kinds were cured by its power, even up to this day, to the glory of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

Then the king said to St. Nino and the bishop, 'I will convert the mountain clansmen at the edge of the sword and make my son-in-law Peroz [prince of Persia] a servant of God and an adorer of the honourable cross.' But Nino replied, 'God does not command us to raise the sword, but to show the way of truth through the Gospel message and by the honourable cross which leads to life eternal. May God's grace lighten their darkness.' So the king took with him one of the dukes, and they came to Tsoben and summoned the mountain clans, men of wild and savage appearance, and they preached the Gospel of Christian truth to them. But they refused to be baptized.

So the royal duke turned the sword on them and cast down their idols by force. The king laid heavy taxes on those who did not wish to receive baptism, who therefore banded together and became nomads. Some of them were converted by St. Abibos of Nekresi, but others have remained heathen until the present day.

Then St. Nino went into Kakheti and converted the people. They received her teaching with joy and were baptized by Jacob the Priest. Then she went to Bodbe, where she was joined by the Queen of Kakheti with a great following of chiefs, warriors and women-slaves. She told them of Christ's Holy Sacrament, and taught them the true faith with words of good cheer. She related the marvels which had been brought about by the living pillar, about which they had not yet heard. They welcomed St. Nino's teaching with joy, and the queen was baptized with all her chiefs and handmaidens.

When the blessed Nino had completed her work and preaching, she knew that the time was drawing near for her spirit to pass from her body. And she became weak, and could go no farther. From the city of Ujarma, Rev, the king's son, came with Salome his wife to watch over her. King Mirian and his consort Nana sent John the Bishop to see her and bear her back, but she refused to set out. After begging that Jacob the Priest should be named as John's successor, she gave him the letter written to her by Queen Helena, in which Nino was addressed as queen, apostle and evangelist. The Wood of Life she bestowed on Queen Nana. Then John imparted to Nino the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ, and she partook of this provision for her soul's journey. Committing her spirit into the hands of God, she ascended to heaven in the fifteenth year from her arrival in Georgia, in the year of our Lord three hundred and thirty-eight.

Then the two cities of Mtskheta and Ujarma and all

the land of Georgia grieved because of her death. They came and buried her body, resplendent with divine power, at Bodbe, a village in Kakheti. And they built a church there, and appointed a bishop over it, in honour of the holy, blessed enlightener of Georgia, the thrice divinely blessed noble Nino.

When the God-enlightened King Mirian had done this, he confirmed all Georgia and Hereti in the faith of God the Three in One, who is without beginning or end, and the Creator of all. Then they were thoroughly strengthened in their belief. And the Emperor Constantine, who had been holding Mirian's son Bakar as a hostage, sent him home with sumptuous gifts, and wrote :

'I, Constantine, king and autocrat, newly made a servant of the kingdom of heaven, formerly a prisoner of the devil, but delivered by the Creator, I write to you, King Mirian, enlightened by God, like me recently planted in the Faith. Peace be upon you, and the joy of those who know the Trinity, God the infinite, the divine Creator of all. I no longer need to retain a hostage of yours, for it is enough for us to have as mediator between us Christ, the Son of God, who exists from all eternity and who became man for our salvation. I give you your son. Look on him and be glad, and may God's angel of peace be with you. May God the Creator expel Satan the evil one from your country for ever.'

When Prince Bakar and the Emperor Constantine's envoy arrived in Mtskheta, King Mirian and Queen Nana were filled with happiness, and gave thanks to God for all the gifts He had granted them. King Mirian finished building the cathedral, and consecrated it with great pomp in the twenty-fifth year after his conversion.

Afterwards, Rev, his son, died. He was the son-in-law of Tiridates, king of the Armenians, who had handed

over the kingship to him during his own lifetime. They buried Rev in the tomb which he himself had built.

In the same year, King Mirian fell sick, and felt his death drawing near. He said to his son Bakar, 'My son, my darkness had been turned into light, and death into life. To you I give the crown of my kingdom. May God, who created heaven and earth, strengthen you in perfect faith. Obey all the commands of the Son of God, and rely entirely upon them and upon Christ's name. Wherever you find those fire-worshippers with their idols, burn the idols and make them swallow the cinders. Carry the honourable cross before you to overcome your enemies, as the true believers do. Honour the divinely raised column, and direct your hopes upon it. May you fall asleep at last in the faith of the Holy Trinity.'

Then they caused St. Nino's cross to be brought, the cross which she had at the beginning, and they hung the royal crown upon it. They led forward Bakar, and made the sign of the cross upon his head, and took the crown from the cross and placed it on his head. And King Mirian died, and was buried in the Upper Church, by the southern corner of the pillar in which is a piece of the divinely raised column. Next year, Queen Nana died, and they buried her on the west side of the pillar close to King Mirian.

Mirian's son Bakar reigned. He was a believer like his father and converted many of the Caucasian peoples whom his father had not succeeded in turning to the true faith, until he too departed to join his ancestors, imbued with the grace of God.

CHAPTER 2

THE NINE MARTYRED CHILDREN OF KOLA

THE biography of St. Nino shows us that even after Georgia's conversion to Christianity, there was many a remote corner where pagan beliefs lingered on. The touching story of the nine infant martyrs of Kola illustrates the conflict between the Christian message and the faiths of pre-Christian Georgia, and probably goes back to a period not far removed from the time of St. Nino. There is no reason to question the authenticity of the tale, which is based on the local traditions of Kola, a locality in south-western Georgia existing to the present day. The text is translated here without abridgement from the late Professor N. Y. Marr's edition, based on a 10th century manuscript preserved on Mount Athos.

FEBRUARY 22ND. Martyrdom of the Holy Children, nine in number, who were spiritual brothers by baptism at the Sacred Font, but were born each of a different mother.

There was a large village at the source of the great river which is called the Kura, in the valley which they call Kola. Most of the people in that village were idolaters, but a minority were servants of Christ. The Christian and pagan children used to meet at play, as children will, and frolic together all day. But when it was time for vespers the priest rang aloud, and the Christian children would go to the church to say their prayers according to the Christian custom.

Then the pagan children followed them, being nine in number. They were fond of the Christian children and

liked the Christian faith. But when they reached the church doors, the Christians would not let them come inside, but said to them, 'You are sons of idolaters, and not fit to be admitted into God's house.' And they went away downcast and ashamed. This happened to the children many times.

Later on the pagan children came to the Christian church and tried to force their way in. Then the Christians said, 'If you want to come into the church with us, you must believe in our Lord Jesus Christ and be baptized in His name and partake of His Sacrament and join us Christians.'

So immediately they received with joy the teaching of the Christians, and promised to fulfil it. Then the Christians hurried to the priest who was the village pastor, a saintly, worthy and respected man, and told him about the children. And he remembered the words of the Gospel, uttered by our Lord Jesus Christ, 'Whoever will not leave his father and mother, his sisters and brothers, his wife and children, and will not take up his cross and follow me, the same is not worthy of me.'

Then the priest went out to the source of the great river, and many Christians with him. Also with them were the pagan children. It was winter-time, and a frosty night, for by day he would not have dared to baptize them for fear of the pagans. Furthermore our Lord Jesus Christ was also baptized by night by John in the river Jordan.

At this season the water gave out an icy sharpness, but when the children stepped down into the stream and the priest baptized them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, and pronounced the following sacramental words: 'The Holy Ghost descended as a dove upon the Jordan when Christ was baptized. The angels stood by singing hymns—Alleluia, Alleluia'—

then the water gave out great warmth, just like a bath. And by the will of God, angels brought down white robes from heaven and dressed the newly baptized children in them, invisibly to men. The Christian children were their godfathers. And the newly baptized children did not return to their parents, but stayed and lived with the Christians.

After some time had passed, their parents found out what had occurred, and with great wrath and anger and foul oaths and curses they forcibly dragged the children from the Christians' houses. They carried them home, struck them about the head and beat them black and blue. But the children said in reply to their parents, 'We are Christians, and it is not fit for us to partake of the food and drink which is offered up to idols.' And the children passed seven days without eating or drinking, and took no nourishment, but were fed by the Holy Spirit by which they were imbued at their baptism.

Then their parents promised them all kinds of good things and bright clothes of many colours, but they repeated the same thing: 'We are Christians and need nothing from you, only set us free to go to the Christians.' Since they could make no impression on their steadfast faith, they appeared before the prince who was ruling at the time, *himself a pagan*, and told him about the children. Then the prince said to them, 'They are your sons, and you have the right to do what you like with them.'

They said to him, 'Be so gracious as to come with us, and we will break their skulls open with stones, so that others may not imitate them and become Christians.' And they subjected the priest to equally violent persecution: they seized his property, divided up his goods between themselves, wounded him savagely on the head, and drove him out of his dwelling.

Then they fixed the day for the supreme sacrifice of the holy martyrs, and the prince went out with a countless mob of people and came to the source of the stream where the holy children had been baptized, and they dug a very deep hole. And the parents brought the holy children and threw them into the hole, some of them being about nine years old and others seven, more or less. They had no thought to say anything except, 'We are Christians and will perish and be killed for Him in whom we have been baptized.'

After this, their ungodly parents smote their heads and broke open their skulls. Snakes and adders, vipers and wild beasts know how to be merciful to their young, but those godless folk had no pity for their own offspring. Many of the people collected stones, until they had filled up the pit and covered their holy bodies with the boulders, and they threw in on top the earth that had been dug out. That place became their sepulchre and a shrine for their holy relics. Then were fulfilled the words of the Gospel, 'Brother shall put brother to death, and the father the son, and fathers and mothers shall rise up against their children and kill them.'

Their passion was accomplished, and they were counted among the proto-martyrs, and with them rejoice in the kingdom of heaven those who are crowned in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom belong glory and honour and worship, together with the Father and the Holy Ghost, now and for ever and for all eternity, Amen.

CHAPTER 3

A MARTYRED PRINCESS: THE PASSION OF ST. SHUSHANIK

WHILE the nine martyred infants of Kola fell victims to their kinsfolk's rustic beliefs and superstitions, St. Shushanik died as a result of her refusal to accept the Zoroastrian religion professed by Georgia's Iranian overlords.

The life of Shushanik is the oldest surviving work of Georgian literature. It was composed between the years A.D. 476 and 483 by Jacob of Tsurta, father-confessor to the princess, and is remarkable for its directness of language. The background of the saint's life is well known from other historical sources. Shushanik's father, Vardan Mamikonian, was the hero of the Armenian national rising of the year 451, directed against the authority of the Zoroastrian king of Iran, Yezdegird. Shushanik's husband, the Georgian prince Varsken, occupied a strategic position as Pitiakhsh (from Iranian *Bitakhsh*, a viceroy) of the frontier region between Armenia and Georgia. As we see from the life of Shushanik, King Peroz of Iran sent Varsken to fight against the Huns who threatened to invade Persia from the north via Derbent and the shores of the Caspian Sea. Varsken was also supposed to exercise control over the king of Eastern Georgia (Iberia), whose capital at Mtskheta was within easy reach of Varsken's castle in Tsurta.

Shushanik's death was brought about by political as much as by religious considerations. Her refusal to abjure Christianity infuriated her husband, who had

embraced Mazdeism to ingratiate himself with the Persian court. Shushanik's obduracy placed Varsken in a difficult position *vis-à-vis* his suzerain, ultimately provoking him to murder her in particularly atrocious circumstances. He did not long profit by his crime, for the Armenian chronicler Lazarus of Pharp tells us that in the year 484, the redoubtable Christian king of Georgia, Wakhtang Gorgaslan, rose in revolt against the Iranians and took prisoner their renegade ally Varsken, who was put to a painful and ignominious death. In addition to these political sidelights, the life of Shushanik is also of interest to the social historian for the insight it gives into such questions as the relations between the sexes in early Christian society and the climatic and sanitary conditions of ancient Caucasia.

OCTOBER 17TH. Passion of the Holy Queen Shushanik.

It was in the eighth year of the reign of the king of Persia that Varsken the Pitiakhsh, son of Arshusha, travelled to the royal court.¹ Formerly he too was a Christian, born of Christian father and mother. And his wife was the daughter of Vardan, generalissimo of the Armenians, bearing the name of Varden, or Rose, after her father, and the pet-name of Shushanik, or Susanna; and she lived in the fear of God from her childhood days. Because of the unrighteousness of her husband, she prayed perpetually in her heart and besought all to pray God to convert him from his deluded ways, so that he might become wise in Christ.

But who could describe the wickedness of that abandoned and thrice wretched Varsken? For when he appeared before the king of the Persians, it was not to receive honour by rendering service to the monarch, but to deliver himself up body and soul by denying the True

¹At Ctesiphon in Iran. The king of Iran mentioned must be Peroz, whose eighth year would fall in A.D. 466.

God. So he bowed down to the fire, utterly cutting himself off from Christ. And this miserable man sought to win favour in the eyes of the king of the Persians by asking him for a wife, adding, 'The lawful wife and children I already have, these I will likewise convert to your faith, just like myself.' (In making this pledge, however, he had reckoned without Shushanik.) Then the king rejoiced, and gave him his own daughter to be his bride.

Soon after the Pitiakhsh took leave of the king. And as he was approaching the borders of Georgia, the land of Hereti, it occurred to him to have the noblemen and his sons and retainers informed that they were to meet him, so that in their company he might enter the country like a snake. He therefore despatched one of his servants on a post-horse. When the servant had arrived at the township which is called Tsurtav, he came in and appeared before Shushanik our queen, and enquired after her well-being. But the blessed Shushanik said with prophetic insight, 'If he is alive in soul, you are both alive, both he and thou. If you are both dead in your spirit, that enquiry of thine needs to be addressed to thyself.' But the man dared not answer her. St. Shushanik, however, insisted and questioned him urgently, until the man told her the truth, saying, 'Varsken has renounced the True God.'

When the blessed Shushanik heard this, she fell upon the ground and beat her head on the floor and said with bitter tears, 'Pitiable indeed has become the unfortunate Varsken! He has forsaken the True God, and embraced the religion of fire and united himself to the godless.' And she arose and left her palace and went into the church, filled with the fear of the Lord. With her she took her three sons and one daughter and brought them before the altar and prayed. And when the evening

service was over, she found a small cottage near the church, and went into it, filled with grief, and leant against the wall in a corner and wept bitterly.

Now the bishop attached to the Pitiakhsh's household, whose name was Aphots, was not at hand, having gone to the house of a certain holy man to consult him about some question. And I too, the confessor of Queen Shushanik, was with the bishop. Suddenly a deacon came to us from home and told us all that had occurred : the arrival of the Pitiakhsh and the conduct of the queen. We were filled with sorrow and wept abundantly, being weighed down by the consciousness of our sins.

But I got up early and went to the village where the blessed Shushanik was. And when I saw her afflicted with sorrow, I also wept with her.

While we were conversing, a certain Persian arrived and came in before the blessed Shushanik, and said in lachrymose tones, 'How so? A peaceful household has become miserable, and joy has turned to grief!' But he had actually come on a secret errand from Varsken, and said this as a ruse to ensnare the blessed one.

But the saint recognized his cunning intention, and became all the more firm in her resolve.

Three days after, Varsken the Pitiakhsh came. And the Persian spoke to him privately and said, 'I gather that your wife has left you. I would advise you, however, not to speak harsh words to her. After all, women are always liable to be unreasonable.'

The next day, the Pitiakhsh summoned us priests as soon as he had got up, and we went to him. He received us agreeably and said to us, 'Be at your ease and do not shrink away from me.' In reply we said to him, 'You have brought damnation on yourself and on us also!' Then he began to speak, and said, 'How could my wife allow herself to do such a thing to me? Now go and tell

her that she has degraded my person and sprinkled ashes upon my bed and forsaken her rightful place and gone elsewhere.'

To this St. Shushanik replied, 'It is not I who either exalted your person or degraded it. Your father raised up sepulchres for the martyrs and built churches, and you have ruined the deeds of your father and destroyed his good works. Your father invited saints into his house, but you invite devils. He confessed and believed in the God of heaven and earth, but you have renounced the True God and bowed down before the fire. Just as you have despised your Creator, so I pour contempt upon you. Even if you inflict many tortures on me, I will have no part in your doings.'

We reported all this to the Pitiakhsh, as a result of which he became angry and bellowed with rage. Then the Pitiakhsh commissioned Jojik his brother and Jojik's wife, his sister-in-law, and the bishop attached to his household, and told them to speak to her in the following terms: 'Get up and come to your rightful place, and give up these notions of yours! If not, I shall drag you back by force.'

So they came and entered in before the queen and spoke many reassuring words to her. Then St. Shushanik said to them, 'O wise men! Do not think I was nothing but a wife to him. I had imagined that I could convert him to my faith, so that he would acknowledge the True God. And do you now try to force me to act thus? Let this never happen to me! You, Jojik, are no longer my brother-in-law, nor am I your sister-in-law, nor is your wife my sister, since you are on his side and take part in his doings.'

And as they were pressing and urging her excessively, the saintly and blessed Shushanik arose to go. Taking her copy of the Gospels with her, she said with tears,

'O Lord God, Thou knowest that I am resolved in heart to meet my death.' When she had spoken these words, she went with them and carried her Gospel with her, as well as the holy books of the Martyrs.

When she came into the palace she took up her residence not in her apartments, but in a small chamber. And St. Shushanik raised her hands to heaven and said, 'O Lord God! Not one merciful man, neither priest nor layman, has been found among this people, but they have all handed me over to die at the hands of Varsken, that enemy of God.'

Two days later that wolf came into the palace and said to his retainers, 'Today, I and Jojik and his wife are dining together. Do not allow anyone to come in to us.' And when it was evening they called Jojik's wife and decided to bring the holy Shushanik to dine with them too. When they had wearied her with their insistence, they obliged her to accompany them to the palace, but she had no appetite for anything. Jojik's wife, however, offered her wine in a glass, and tried to make her drink a little of it. St. Shushanik said to her angrily, 'Whenever has it been the custom for men and women to dine together?' And stretching out her arm, she flung the glass in her face, and the wine was spilt.

Then Varsken began to utter foul-mouthed insults and kicked her with his foot. Picking up a poker, he crashed it on her head and split it open and injured one of her eyes. And he struck her face unmercifully with his fist and dragged her to and fro by her hair, bellowing like a wild beast and roaring like a madman.

Jojik his brother rose to protect her, and came to grips with him and struck him. After her veil had been torn from her head, Jojik dragged her from Varsken's hands, like a lamb from the claws of a wolf. St. Shushanik lay like a corpse upon the ground, while Varsken abused her

kinsfolk and called her the defiler of his home. And he commanded her to be bound and chains to be attached to her feet.

When he had calmed down a little from his outburst of rage, the Persian came to him and urgently begged him to free St. Shushanik from her chains. After insistent pleading, he ordered her to be unchained and taken to a cell and carefully guarded. She was to have one servant, and nobody else would be allowed to visit her, neither man nor woman.

When it was dawn, he asked her servant, 'How are her wounds?' He said to him, 'They are past healing.' Then he himself went in and looked at her, and was greatly astonished at the size of her swelling. And he directed the servant not to let anyone come and see her. He himself went out hunting.

But I got up and went and said to the guard, 'Just let me in by myself to have a look at her wounds.' But he said to me, 'What if he finds out and kills me?' I said to him, 'Miserable man, did she not bring you up and educate you? If he kills you for her sake, what have you to regret?' Then he let me in secretly.

When I went in, I saw her face all slashed and swollen, and I raised my voice and wept. But St. Shushanik said to me, 'Do not weep for me, since this night has been for me the beginning of joy.' And I said to St. Shushanik, 'Let me wash the blood from your face and the dust which has fallen into your eyes, and apply ointment and medicine, so that please God you may be cured.' But St. Shushanik said to me, 'Do not say that, Father, for this blood is for the cleansing of my sins.' But I gently forced her to take some food, which had been sent by Bishop Samuel and John, who secretly watched over her and saw to her welfare. St. Shushanik said to me, 'Father, I cannot taste anything, because my jaws and several of

my teeth are broken.' Then I brought a little wine and bread, and dipped it in, and she tasted a little. And I made haste to go out. Then St. Shushanik said to me, 'Father, shall I send him back this jewellery of his? Even if he does not require it, I shall have no more use for it in this life.' But I said, 'Do not hurry, let it remain in your keeping.'

While we were discussing this, a boy came in and said, 'Is Jacob here?' And I said, 'What do you want?' He said, 'The Pitiakhsh is calling for you.' And I was surprised and wondered why he called for me now, so hurried to go. He said to me, 'Do you know, Priest, that I am leaving to fight against the Huns? I have no intention of leaving my jewellery with her, now that she is not my wife. Someone else will have to be found to wear it. Go and bring whatever there is of it.'

So I went and told this to St. Shushanik. She was very glad and thanked God and handed everything over to me, and I delivered it all to the Pitiakhsh. He received it from me, inspected it and found everything complete, and again said, 'At some later time, someone will be found to adorn herself with it.'

And when Lent was come, the blessed Shushanik came and found a small cell near the church, and took up her abode in it.

On Monday in Easter week, the Pitiakhsh returned from fighting against the Huns. The Devil animated his heart, and he arose and went to the church and said to Bishop Aphots, 'Give me my wife! Why are you keeping her away from me?' And he began to curse and utter violent maledictions against God. But a priest said to him, 'Lord, why are you behaving like this and uttering such evil words and cursing the bishop and speaking with anger against the saintly Shushanik?' But he struck the priest in the back with his staff, so that he dared not say anything more.

So St. Shushanik was dragged out by force through the mud and over the thorns from the church to the palace, just as if they were dragging a corpse along. And he ordered her to be tied up and beaten, and reviled her saying, 'Now you see that your Church is no help to you, nor those Christian supporters of yours, nor that God of theirs!' Three hundred blows they struck her with a stick, without any moan or complaint passing her lips. After this St. Shushanik said to the impious Varsken, 'Unhappy man, you have had no pity on yourself, and cut yourself off from God, so how can you have pity on me?'

When he saw the blood flowing abundant from her tender flesh, he ordered a chain to be fastened round her neck, and commanded a chamberlain to take St. Shushanik to the castle and imprison her in a dark dungeon to die.

A certain deacon belonging to the bishop's staff stood near St. Shushanik when she was being taken from the palace, and tried to encourage her to stand fast, when the Pitiakhsh cast his eye on him. He only managed to say, 'Sta . . .,' and then was silent and hastily took to his heels and ran away.

Then they took her out. St. Shushanik was led bare-foot, with her hair disordered, like some woman of the common folk. Nor did anyone dare to cover her head, because the Pitiakhsh followed on horseback behind her, cursing her with much foul language. With the saint was a great mob of women and men, countless in number, following behind her, and they raised their voices and wept, and tore their cheeks and shed tears of pity for St. Shushanik. But St. Shushanik looked upon the crowd and said to them, 'Weep not, my brothers, my sisters and my children, but remember me in your prayers now that I am taking leave of you from this world. For you will not see me leave the castle alive.'

When the Pitiakhsh saw the mob and the lamentation of men and women, old and young, he charged at them on his horse and forced them all to run away. When they reached the castle bridge, the Pitiakhsh said to St. Shushanik, 'This is all the walking you will ever do, for you will not come out alive, until the time comes for four bearers to carry you out.' When they had entered the castle, they found a small dark hut to the north of it, and there they locked up the saint. They left her with the chain still fastened round her neck, and this the impious Varsken stamped with his seal. Then he left the castle.

On the third Sunday, he summoned a gaoler and asked him, 'Is that miserable woman still alive?' He replied, 'Lord! She appears nearer to death than to life. She is likely to die from hunger alone, since she will eat nothing.' To which he answered, 'Never mind, leave her alone, let her die.'

Then the Pitiakhsh went off to Chor.¹ Jojik his brother was not present when these things were done to St. Shushanik. When Jojik arrived, he hastened after the Pitiakhsh, caught up with him on the borders of Hereti, and implored him to have her released from her fetters. After he had greatly importuned Varsken, he ordered her to be unchained. When Jojik returned, he removed the chain from her neck.

But St. Shushanik was not released from her shackles until her death. For she remained six years in the castle, and blossomed forth with her religious observances, ever fasting, keeping vigil and watching, in unwearying adoration and assiduous reading of holy books. The entire castle was made radiant and beautiful by the lyre of her spirit.

From now on, her works became renowned through-

¹An ancient fortress on the Caspian Sea at the edge of the Caucasus, near Derbent.

out all Georgia. Men and women used to come for the fulfilment of their vows. Whatever they had need of was bestowed on them through the holy prayer of the blessed Shushanik, namely a child to the childless, healing to the sick, and to the blind, restoration of sight.

They told St. Shushanik, 'Your children have been converted to Mazdeism.' Then with many tears she began to worship God and beat her head upon the ground and groaned, saying, 'I give thanks to Thee, O Lord God of mine, for they were not mine, but gifts from Thee! As Thou wilt, Thy will be done, O Lord. Save me from the schemes of the Evil One.'

Then the Pitiakhsh sent messengers and said, 'Either do my will and return to the palace, or if you will not come home, I will send you under guard to Chor or to the Persian court.'

St. Shushanik, however, answered, 'Wretched and stupid man! If you send me to Chor or to the Persian court, who knows if some good may not come to me and this evil be averted?'

The Pitiakhsh pondered over these words which she had uttered, 'Who knows if some good may not come to me?' which he took to mean, 'Perhaps one of the princes there might take her to wife.' From then onwards, he sent no one to her.

Later, however, the Pitiakhsh deputed her own foster-brother to bring her back to the palace. When he said to her, 'Listen to me and come back to the palace, and do not leave your home desolate,' then St. Shushanik replied, 'Tell that godless man this: You have killed me, and you declared that I should never come out of this castle on my feet alive! And now, if you can raise the dead, first raise your mother who is buried at Urdi. For if you cannot raise her up, neither can you bring me out of here, unless you drag me by force.'

When she had passed six years in this prison, excessive weariness from her feats of courage and devotion brought sickness upon her. Furthermore that place was incredibly infested with fleas and lice. In the summer time the heat of the sun burns like fire, the winds are torrid and the waters infected. The inhabitants of this region are themselves afflicted with various diseases, being swollen with dropsy, yellow with jaundice, pock-marked, withered up, mangy, pimply, bloated of face and brief of life, and nobody attains old age in that district.

When the seventh year had begun, the holy and thrice blessed Shushanik was afflicted with an ulcer of the flesh. As a result of her tireless acts of piety, her feet became swollen, and pustules broke out on various parts of her body. The ulcers were very large and infested with worms. One of these she held out in her hand and showed it to me, and gave thanks to God, saying, 'Father, do not let the sight of this upset you. There (i.e. in Hell) the worm is greater, and never dies.'¹ When I saw this worm, I was afflicted with inexpressible distress, and wept greatly. But she retorted sharply, 'Father, why are you sorrowful? Rather than being eaten by those immortal worms, it is better to be consumed here in this life by mortal ones!'

When Jojik heard that the blessed queen St. Shushanik was near to death, he went out and brought with him his wife and children and his servants and retainers, and came to the castle to see the saintly Shushanik the martyr. Then she blessed Jojik and his wife and children and his servants and retainers and all the members of his household, and bade them walk in the ways of God. And she took leave of them and sent them away in peace.

After Jojik there came Archbishop Samuel and his friend Bishop John, who had encouraged her and taken

¹Cf. Mark ix. 44.

part in her good works. Likewise there came the grantees and noble ladies, the gentry and common folk of the land of Georgia. Their eyes were filled with tears as they said farewell to her, and they offered up praise to God for her glorious works, and then they left the castle and departed.

Then came the day when she was to be called away. And she summoned the bishop attached to her household, Aphots, and thanked him for his kindness, which equalled that of a father and a foster-parent. She called for me, sinner and wretch that I am, and committed to us the relics of her bones, commanding us to bury them in that place from which she was first dragged forth. And she said, 'Though I am but a worker of the eleventh hour in the vineyard, if I have any merit, you shall all be blessed for ever and ever.'

Then she gave thanks to God, saying, 'Blessed is our Lord God, for on Him I will lay myself down and sleep in peace.' And she entrusted her soul to the Lord, who receives all mankind in His mercy.

The beginning of the torments of St. Shushanik was in the month of January, on the eighth day, being a Wednesday. Her second beating took place on Monday in Easter Week. And her death was in the month of October, on the seventeenth day, being the festival of the blessed saints and martyrs Cosmas and Damian, and it was a Thursday. This anniversary we set apart for the commemoration of St. Shushanik, and for the praising of God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, to whom belong glory for ever and ever, Amen.

CHAPTER 4

A MILITANT ASCETIC: PETER THE IBERIAN BISHOP OF MAYUMA BY GAZA

WITH the life and career of Peter the Iberian (c. 409–488), we emerge from the local traditions of the Georgian Church into the wider arena of Byzantine religious and political affairs. During the events surrounding the Council of Chalcedon, held in the year 451, Peter stood out as champion of the Monophysite or anti-Chalcedonian cause, denying the doctrine of the dual nature of Christ as formulated at that Council. While the orthodox Patriarch Sophronius of Jerusalem indignantly refers to Peter as ‘that putrefaction from Georgia, with his barbarous mind,’ the Syrian, Coptic and Armenian Churches, which also refused to accept the dogma of Chalcedon, regard Peter as an eminent saint and ascetic. Peter’s native Georgian Church has tried to gloss over his doctrinal deviations.

Born the son of a Christian king of Georgia, Peter renounced his royal lineage for an ascetic life in the Holy Land. His biography provides valuable material for the history of the Christian Orient during the 5th century, since Peter was personally acquainted with many prominent personalities of the time, including the Emperor Theodosius II and his consort Eudocia, St. Melania the Younger, and the famous Patriarchs Nestorius, Juvenal, Proterius of Alexandria and Timothy the Cat, and has handed down vivid reminiscences of them. Furthermore, the late Professor Ernest Honigmann sought to identify Peter the Iberian as author of the important mystical

writings purporting to have been composed by the Apostle Paul's contemporary, Dionysius the Areopagite. This theory has aroused considerable discussion in recent years, but has not found general acceptance.

Peter's life has come down to us in two versions. First there is the biography originally written in Greek by Peter's disciple John Rufus soon after the saint's death. Of this, we now have only the Syriac translation, in a manuscript dating from the 8th century. Another biography, preserved in a Georgian version, apparently derives at third-hand from the lost Greek life of Peter by Zacharias Rhetor, bishop of Mitylene, and in its present form is not older than the 13th century. This Georgian text has been much distorted by its pious redactors, who wanted to present the heretic Peter as an impeccably Orthodox saint. For this reason, we have preferred to draw on John Rufus' version, adding a few episodes from a collection of Peter's reminiscences known as the *Plerophoriæ*, also preserved in Syriac. It should be noted that such terms as 'orthodox' and 'God-fearing' are used in Peter's biography in the sense of Monophysite and anti-Chalcedonian, while the partisans of Chalcedonian Orthodoxy are termed 'renegades' and 'apostates.'

Biography of the holy Peter the Iberian, the venerable bishop, ascetic and confessor of our Lord.

The blessed Peter's fatherland was the renowned country of the Iberians, those northern people who dwell towards the rising of the sun—a land perpetually at war with the Romans and the Persians, because each of these nations was attempting to annex it for strategic reasons. In the language of their country, he first bore the name Nabarnugios, but when he was made worthy to bear a monk's holy garb he was given instead the name of Peter, after that of the first of the Apostles.

Now the father of the blessed Peter was Bosmarios, king of the Iberians, and his father's father was also called Bosmarios. His mother was Bakurdukhtia, and his grandfather on his mother's side was the great Bacurius.¹ On his father's side, his grandmother was Osdukhtia, whose brother Pharasmanios enjoyed great favour with Arcadius, Emperor of the Romans, and occupied the rank of general in the army and a position of supreme distinction. Later, however, the intrigues of Eudoxia, wife of Arcadius, forced him to seek refuge in flight. Returning swiftly to his homeland, he reigned over the Iberians and called in the White Huns [A.D. 395] who were neighbours of the Iberians, as a result of which the peoples subject to the Romans suffered great disasters.

The brother of the great Bacurius was the saintly Archilios, who reigned jointly with Bacurius and Bosmarios according to the custom of the Iberian royal house. He attained a great age, and ended his life in chastity and all piety.

The blessed Peter had no blood-brother. He had a half-sister on his father's side, born of a concubine, and her name was Bomisparia. In accordance with his father's wishes, however, he treated her as a full sister. A holy and renowned woman called Tsutso brought Peter up as a child, and he remained hidden in her home to avoid being handed over as a hostage to the Persians, who sent many envoys to gain possession of his person.

After he had thus been conceived, born and brought up under the protection of God's grace, he was despatched [A.D. 421] at the age of twelve as a hostage to the God-fearing and Christian king of the Romans, Theodosius the Younger, since his father Bosmarios

¹Evidently the same Bacurius who served in Palestine and told the chronicler Rufinus the story of St. Nino which we have reproduced in the first chapter of this book.

valued the friendship of the Romans as Christians more highly than that of the godless Persians. He was sent off with great ceremony and pomp, and when he came to the blessed Theodosius he was welcomed affectionately and brought up and loved like a son.

Observing the reverence and love which the Emperor Theodosius and the Empress Eudocia bore towards Christ, as also did the men and women who served them, and notably the eunuchs who are called chamberlains, he was inflamed with zeal. And there was a certain deacon, a native of Antioch, and one of the outstanding members of the clergy, whose name was Basil. It was he who set Father Peter on the road to salvation when he was a child at the imperial city, and lit in him the flame of monastic life.

When still living at home with his parents, he had already imbibed the love of God, so that it was like a spark within him. Now therefore he fanned this spark carefully from day to day by feats of pious austerity, until he had made himself into a complete flame of heavenly goodness. Next to his body he wore a hair tunic, on top of which, to hide his virtuous conduct, he wore a brilliant and resplendent robe. His food was that which Daniel and his friends used to eat, and this he took in moderation only once in three or four days, or sometimes only once a week. To subdue the disorderly pleasures of the flesh he resorted to self-chastisement, and the earth served the young and tender prince as a bed.

He had with him the relics of holy martyrs, Persian by nationality, who had died a martyr's death in those days. (Their names are known to us even today from tradition handed down by the blessed Peter, so that we still celebrate their anniversaries and read their acts.) These he had laid with all honour in a coffer in the same

room where he performed his pious devotions. There he would sleep before them on the ground and perform sacred rites with candles and incense, hymns and prayers.

Now once when the festival of the Holy Epiphany had arrived, at which time custom demanded that every senator pay a visit to the emperor and to one another, he shut himself up in the martyrs' room and sent to his chamberlain for oil to be brought to light the lamps. But the latter was indignant because Peter took no delight in the things of this world and said, 'Woe to the great hopes placed in him by his country, now that he who was sent to the Romans for the sake of honour and royal splendour wants to become a monk and bring misery on all of us his companions!' And he refused to send any oil. But when the holy youth and sage perceived the activity of the Evil One, he filled all the lamps with water alone, and no oil, and lit them. And they stayed alight continuously night and day for the seven days of the holy festival. When the emperor and all his family and the members of the Senate heard of this, they were amazed, so that many of them conceived the desire to imitate his conduct and ascetic way of life.

Our father and bishop, the venerable Abba Peter the Iberian, used to tell us that he was in Constantinople when Nestorius was still alive and exercising the episcopate. 'When Nestorius was ending the commemoration of the Forty Holy Martyrs¹ in the church which is called Maria, he rose in my presence to expound the scriptures before all the people. He had a clear and feminine voice. In front of me, he began to blaspheme and say in the middle of his sermon: Thou shalt not be glorified, O Mary, as if thou hadst given birth to God; but O ex-

¹The Forty Martyrs of Sebastia, in Armenia. These were forty Christian soldiers martyred by being frozen to death during the reign of Licinius, about A.D. 316.

cellent one, thou hast given birth not to God, but to a man, the instrument of God.—As soon as he had said this, he was possessed in the pulpit by a demon, so that his face and right hand were twisted askew. As he was all bent up and on the point of falling, the attendants and deacons seized him quickly and carried him into the sacristy. From then on, most of the townsfolk cut themselves off from communion with him, especially the people of the palace, and in particular I myself, although he was very fond of me.'

'While I was still a child,' he used to tell us, 'and residing at the palace in Constantinople, holding vigil and living an ascetic life, I used to reason in my mind on the mystery of the Holy Trinity—how it is that when we confess one single God, we believe at the same time in a Trinity of the same essence, eternal, without beginning; and also whether He who was incarnate for us is one of the Trinity.' Then he told us that he had a vision in which the Apostle Peter led him to a high place and showed him in the heavens a great light, inaccessible and incomprehensible, in the shape of a wheel, like the sun, and said to him: That is the Father. Then he showed him a second light which followed the first and resembled it completely, in the middle of which was our Lord, represented with the features of the Nazarene, and he added: That is the Son. Finally he showed him a third light similar in every way to the preceding ones, and St. Peter said to him: That is the Holy Spirit—one essence, one nature, one glory, one power, one light, one Godhead, in three hypostases; but while all three are inaccessible, only that in the centre was represented with the figure of the Nazarene, to show that He who was crucified is one of the Holy Trinity and not another—far from it! But the two others are simply a light inaccessible, unimaginable, unattainable, incomprehensible.'

Now as Peter grew in age and spiritual love, he experienced a compelling urge to retire from the world and its emptiness and undertake a pilgrimage, that most virtuous of enterprises. But though he tried many times to flee away, he could not succeed in doing so, for the devil and his myrmidons found it out. Peter's slaves, namely the spearmen who carried him around in his litter, went so far in their hate for him that they made many secret attempts on his life. The god-fearing Emperor Theodosius himself was concerned to keep Peter as a hostage, in case his own people demanded him back. If he could not then return Peter to them, the emperor feared that he might make them into militant enemies instead of friends and allies. So he had him strongly guarded to stop him leaving secretly.

But nothing is stronger than the power of Christ, and nothing warmer than the love of those who love Him uprightly. Christ had loved Peter from his childhood days, and protected him as one of His sheep. So now Peter found a helpmate given by God in the person of his godfather, John the Eunuch, who shared his aspirations and was like him in his longing for the life eternal. Originally John came from the land of Lazica, and was adorned with all reverence and meekness. Peter united himself with him by the bonds of affection, like Paul with Barnabas, and availed himself of his advice and companionship in his escape.

As Peter knew that it was through the activities of the demons that their plans failed to remain secret, he took John to the coffer where the bones of the holy martyrs were laid. While they both had their heads bowed over these relics and spoke to each other there, they arranged the time and manner of their escape.

Now that they felt themselves to be secure, they looked for a ship. Through the help of the martyrs, they found

one, and boarded it immediately. But they feared they might be captured if they were pursued, or if they were recognized at the straits of the Bosphorus, so they changed into shabby slaves' costume. Then by the protection of God, they managed to escape the vigilance of the people who were stationed in the Bosphorus to intercept them.

At this point they left their ship and continued on foot. They went on their way alone through Asia Minor, in company with the holy martyrs, whose venerable relics they carried in a golden casket. In joy and happiness, as if it had been a short excursion, they covered the distance from the New Rome to Jerusalem. When they had reached the outskirts of the holy city of Jerusalem which they loved, they saw from a high place five stades away the lofty roof of the holy church of the Resurrection, shining like the morning sun, and cried aloud, 'See, that is Sion, the city of our deliverance!' They fell down upon their faces, and from there onwards they crept upon their knees, frequently kissing the soil with their lips and eyes, until they were within the holy walls and had embraced the site of the sacred cross on Golgotha.

Seeing that they were strangers in the Holy Places, God Himself led them to good hosts, guides and helpers in their holy purpose, namely the blessed Melania, a Roman lady residing there with her husband Pinianus and her mother Albina. Among the senatorial families of Rome, they had occupied the first place, possessing lineage, riches and honour, but since they loved Christ dearly and despised all these things, they had renounced the world and departed to live in prayer at the Holy City. When they had arrived there they built two large monasteries on the Mount of Olives, near the holy church of the Ascension, one for men and one for women, and endowed them for the glory of God.

When Melania heard of the arrival in Jerusalem of the holy youths Peter and John—at this point, however, they were still called in the language of their homeland Nabarnugios and Mithradates—she received them gladly. She remembered that she had once visited Constantinople and seen the blessed Peter there as a young boy when he was being brought up to a king's estate. So Melania welcomed the saints like beloved sons, and they became held in honour for the exemplary life they led in the monastery which she had built. Without delay they received the monk's habit from the renowned Gerontius, who was priest and abbot on the Mount of Olives. This Gerontius enjoyed a great reputation, and lived until the days of the apostasy of the synod of Chalcedon, when he showed the zeal of true witness throughout his bondage and afflictions.

Now that they were living in peace in the monastery of which Gerontius was abbot, they deposited there the venerated relics of the holy martyrs, side by side with those of the renowned Forty Martyrs of Sebastia, over whose interment the righteous and blessed Cyril, archbishop of Alexandria, presided [A.D. 438–39]. For when Cyril was requested by the pious Empress Eudocia to come and inter the relics of the proto-martyr Stephen and to consecrate the beautiful temple which she had built outside the northern gate of the city, he accepted the invitation with gladness. After he had arrived with a company of bishops from all Egypt, he also acceded to the request of the holy Melania to celebrate the interment of the Persian martyrs together with the Forty Martyrs of Sebastia in the smaller temple on the Mount of Olives, which had also been splendidly restored by the Empress Eudocia, as is commemorated by an inscription on one of the walls there.

At this time, the holy city of Jerusalem was still lack-

ing in inhabitants, as well as being deprived of walls, since the former walls had been destroyed by the Romans. As the bishops residing in Jerusalem wanted to increase the number of citizens, they gave free permission to anyone to take whatever site he liked gratis, and build there a dwelling place. Accordingly the blessed Peter chose a place on the north side by the holy church of Sion near the so-called Tower of David, and built there a cloister which is called to this day the Abbey of the Iberians, and lies to the left when you go from the second door of that tower towards the holy church of Sion.

We must not omit to mention a miracle which occurred while they were building this place. Their neighbour was a prominent member of the clergy who had also taken a site and was building a residence on it. While Peter was sitting quietly in his cell, a quarrel arose over the boundary line, as often happens between neighbours. John the Eunuch, who was outside with the workmen, spoke to the other in peaceable and conciliatory tones, as was his custom. The other, who was in the wrong, hit him violently on the cheek. In spite of the pain he felt John made no attempt to retaliate but went indoors to join Father Peter, holding his cheek with his hand. Then they both went down on their knees and gave thanks to our Lord, because He had deemed them worthy to be partakers of the blows which He had suffered. On the following morning that shameless man was dead, although he had felt no previous pains. All the citizens of Jerusalem realized that God the righteous was prompt to punish the shame inflicted on these holy men, to whom He afforded every assistance.

As they were living by themselves and still had some money left out of what they had brought from Constantinople, they decided to perform good works by welcoming and refreshing the pilgrims and poor folk who

came from all sides to pray at the Holy Places. They laid in a supply of provisions, and invited in pilgrims in such numbers that it often happened that they had ten tables in one day, especially on high feasts.

However their residence there was not fated to be of long duration. The Empress Eudocia, consort of the pious Emperor Theodosius the Younger, heard of the zeal of the afore-mentioned Melania, and likewise conceived the desire for the calm and tranquillity of the Holy City, to worship and be near the scene of the Passion which Christ, the King of Glory, suffered for us. In pomp and ceremony she passed through various towns, and arrived at the Holy City for which she longed. When she heard that Father Peter lived there she was anxious to see him, since she had brought him up with a mother's tender love at the royal palace. At first, he begged that he might be excused from leaving his cell, since he regarded this as a temptation. But since she insisted, he came out on one occasion to talk to her. She observed with attention his great meekness and wisdom and said, 'Blessed are you, my son, for you have chosen the good thing! Remember me in your holy prayers!' But he rejoined, 'What benefit can a sinner's prayers bring?' But she replied, 'May your sins be upon my head, my son.' And so he returned to his cell in peace.

But when she again insisted on seeing him, he hastened to the holy Zeno, the hermit and prophet, a pupil of the great and renowned Silvanus, and revealed his thoughts to him, as he was accustomed to do. From him, Peter received the counsel, 'Save yourself and flee.' Accordingly, he left the holy city of Jerusalem, handing over his cloister to a group of men who had likewise renounced the world, and went to stay in the monastic community which is situated between Gaza and the small town named Mayuma which is by the seaside. It

was divine providence which guided his wandering to this place, thus providing for this most Christian town a high priest and bishop particularly suited for this time of apostasy, at which there was need for a man who could be at once an inspirer of reverence and a preacher, a custodian of the orthodox faith and an intercessor for our souls.

While he was living in this community he used constantly to go with his cell-mate John to visit the holy Zeno, who then lived in the village of Kefr-Searta, fifteen miles from Gaza. The blessed Peter used to relate in after years, 'Once when I came to him, the holy Zeno was standing in prayer. And he turned to me and said, Pray! This he repeated three times. In astonishment I said to him, Forgive me, reverend Father, but do you not know that I am a layman and a sinner? Then he said, Yes, yes. Forgive me. He himself completed the prayers and sat down.' And seven days later Peter was himself ordained!

A.D. 445. How this came about we must not pass over in silence. When Peter was still living in the Holy City, Juvenal, who was then its bishop, sought many times to ordain him, but could not succeed in doing so, for God was Peter's protector.¹ Now at this time when Peter was residing in the vicinity of Mayuma, Juvenal's nephew, Paul, was bishop of that place. On the commemoration day of the glorious martyr Victor, when an assembly of many bishops was in session, Paul drew one of these aside and persuaded him to carry out the ordination. This bishop took with him as his assistant the blessed father superior Irenaeus, who was on good terms with these holy men, and caught Peter and John by surprise

¹Juvenal of Jerusalem was detested by the Monophysites for his role in the proceedings of the Council of Chalcedon and in the political events of the time. To have been ordained by him would have been regarded as a mark of disgrace.

and ordained them to the priesthood under duress in spite of their struggles and resistance. Then Peter recognized the foreknowledge and prophetic wisdom of the holy Zeno.

A.D. 451. After he had thus received the laying on of hands, Peter refused obstinately for seven years to carry out the priestly offices, until it fell to him to be raised to the episcopate in the time of the transgression of Chalcedon. It was then that the apostasy of all those schismatic bishops, sanctioned by the godless *Tome* of Pope Leo, and attended by the adoption of the scandalous doctrine of Nestorius, resulted in Dioscorus, chief of the bishops of Egypt and a zealous fighter for truth, being driven into banishment, while Juvenal, who bore the title of bishop of Jerusalem, signed the act of apostasy and thereby assumed the role of the traitor Judas.

A.D. 452. When this became known to the clergy and monks of Palestine they came out into the streets before Juvenal and implored him to remember his promise to eschew godlessness and fight for the true cause. When he refused to yield they assembled in the Holy City and elected the blessed Theodosius, a man devoted from his youth to the monastic way of life and imbued with the fear of the Lord, and who had distinguished himself even at the godless synod by his championship of the orthodox faith, and they made him pastor of the Holy City of Jerusalem. Afterwards Theodosius chose pious men from among the monks and bearers of the cross to consecrate them as bishops and confessors of the faith. Then the citizens of Mayuma which belongs to Gaza, who knew the blessed Peter to possess every virtue, hurried to the spot where he was living in tranquillity and carried him off by force, although he bolted the door against them. A crowd of prominent burghers and clergy and common people bore him to the Holy City, so that

they might receive a pastor and bishop from the hands of the chief of the priesthood.

On the way they came to a village called Sokha, and turned into an inn nearby, while the saint and his attendants spent the night in a house at the upper end of the village. In the depths of the night, when everyone was tired out from the journey, he asked his guardians for permission to go out on to the roof as if to satisfy a need of nature. When he had emerged by himself he hastened to cast himself down from the height on to a rocky place nearby, in the expectation that he would either escape completely, or be so maimed and disabled that his captors would release him. When he was about to commit this action he heard a voice saying, 'Peter, Peter, if you do this, you will have no share in me!' So he was prevented from carrying out his intent and was brought to Jerusalem. He protested his unworthiness, and when he was nevertheless consecrated bishop, he would not perform any church services until he had again been admonished by the voice of God. On the seventh of August, he arrived at the holy church of Mayuma and was borne inside and seated on the throne amidst general rejoicing.

He remained some six months in his holy church, during which time the people of Mayuma joyfully celebrated all the religious festivals, rejoicing in the protection of God who had granted them such a pastor, whom they cherished as an angel with love and affection. Then there arose the devil, that prince of renegades and arch-counsellor of apostates, who was unable to endure the sight of such great glorifying of God and salvation of men. Accordingly he entered into the monarch who now held the reins of government, the Emperor Marcian, who readily listened to the devil's commands; and he incited him to issue a decree deposing the righteous bishops who

had been appointed throughout the towns of Palestine by the apostolic Patriarch Theodosius. In case of resistance, they were to be forcibly expelled from their sees and killed, while the Patriarch Theodosius was condemned to death. They all chose to go into exile, as the Patriarch Theodosius himself advised, since he deemed it more pleasing to God for the preachers of truth to be saved, rather than that they should perish and deprive the orthodox folk of comfort and support.

So the blessed Peter departed into Egypt and arrived by God's will at the city of Alexandria, where the rebel Proterius was now patriarch. Peter went into hiding and afforded encouragement and solace to the orthodox. Celebrating the divine service in secret, he did not allow their zeal and faith to be quenched.

It was granted him to see a fearsome vision in the following circumstances. While all the townsfolk were watching a play in the theatre the faithful believers were filled with zeal and suddenly shouted out, 'Up with Dioscorus and the orthodox! Burn Proterius' bones! Throw out the Judas!' They demanded the return of the pious Dioscorus from his unjust exile, and the expulsion of the ravening wolf and anti-Christ Proterius, the new Caiaphas. The authorities brought in a troop of armed soldiers who surrounded the theatre and menaced the people with slaughter, so that they fled outside and threw each other down in the narrow passages of the theatre, many of them losing their lives. At that time the blessed Peter was celebrating the holy sacrament in secret. In an ecstasy he saw many souls being carried up by the angels into heaven. When people came from the city and told him what had occurred, it transpired that the number of those who had perished by violence in the crush and confusion was the same as that of the blessed souls that he had seen in his vision.

At last the blessed Peter could no longer conceal himself from the godless Proterius, who was eager to deal him a mortal wound and send murderers in the night to seize and kill him. But he succeeded in escaping from them, for our Lord revealed the plot to him. When the emissaries approached and knocked on the door of his hiding-place, they pretended to be some of his friends among the orthodox and begged him to baptize a little boy whom they pictured as being in a critical condition. But a divine voice said to him, 'Do not open, these are scoundrels!' So he and the brethren with him shouted out loud, 'Father in heaven, look down! Robbers! Help!' When the neighbours and others nearby heard this they came running and drove off the villains.

After they had thus been delivered from the snares of the hunters they departed and wandered in the upper regions of the Thebaid until they arrived at the town of Oxyrynchos. There Peter stayed, being cared for by one of the notables of the town, Moses by name. Oxyrynchos was a great and rich town of the Thebaid, in which the grace of God prevailed to such an extent that all the inhabitants were Christians, and the number of monks in the monasteries round about reached ten thousand.

A.D. 457. Later the blessed Peter left Oxyrynchos and returned to Alexandria. Now when the news of the death of Marcian, the leader and arch-inciter of all these evil deeds, reached Alexandria, the God-fearing populace breathed again and gave thanks to our Redeemer Christ. By unanimous resolve they sent into the wilderness to fetch the holy Timothy, that renowned and true confessor, and brought him to the city, right into the church which is called the Kaisarion, to consecrate him as high priest and champion of the faith. But they could find only one of the orthodox bishops, namely Eusebius of Pelusium, the others having hidden themselves from the

persecution. Learning that the blessed Peter was also there, the people hurried to the spot where he was living and carried him on their shoulders to the Kaisarion, where the populace was assembled. And the blessed one together with that other bishop carried out the consecration of Archbishop Timothy, the grace of God being with them.

Seeing himself menaced, the wicked and unprincipled Proterius was even further incensed. So he bribed the authorities with much gold, and notably an officer called Dionysius, a choleric and murderous individual, whom Proterius roused to such a pitch of frenzy that he hastened with an armed troop of brutal soldiery into the holy church of God and murdered many laymen, monks and nuns. Since the multitude could not endure this, they were inflamed with the zeal of martyrdom and daily resisted the soldiery with all the bloodshed of civil war. Then the civic authorities were afraid that this royal city would be altogether ruined. When the news of the accession of the new Emperor Leo reached them, they decided to remove Proterius from the city until instructions were received from the sovereign. While Proterius was being escorted out by the soldiers one of them lost his temper and killed him, twenty days after the consecration of the blessed Timothy. They left him lying in the road like a pig or a dog, which he resembled in his manners and ferocity.

A.D. 457-74. After this, Peter went about Alexandria and the monasteries nearby in secret, and visited many other towns and villages of Egypt, edifying the hosts of true believers like a second Paul and providing for all an exemplary model of pious ardour. The wonders and great miracles and deeds of healing which he performed there we have not the power to describe in full detail.

When all this came to the ears of the orthodox breth-

ren in Palestine it awakened their love towards their holy father and bishop. Many saintly men came to him and entreated him to visit his flock in Palestine also, now that they had been so long deprived of his spiritual care. So he returned to the land of Palestine. When he reached the town of Ascalon, he received a joyous welcome from the brethren there, and stayed in a village called Pelaea, ten stades from the town. While he was there many people came from all sides to see him, some of whom he confirmed in the faith, while others he enlightened and brought into the fold of the orthodox Church. For this purpose he made frequent journeys, now through the region of Gaza and Mayuma, now through that of Cæsarea and Jerusalem, as far as the borders of Arabia.

Now I will relate further incidents in the life of the blessed Peter which the present writer either witnessed in person or else was privileged to learn by report, or heard from the very mouth of the saint, though this narrative will be but a small selection from the abundant material available.

Once the saint happened to go into the regions of Arabia to take a cure by bathing in the thermal waters of Livias, which are called the Spring of Moses. Since his youth he had bruised his body and tormented it by various forms of ascetic discipline, so that his flesh had wasted away and only his skin—and a thin one at that—was stretched over his dried-up bones. In his old age, indeed, he became so weak that he threw up with bloody vomit even what little food he swallowed. This was his motive for going to the hot spring at Livias.

After he had been using the thermal waters there for one day only, he refused to go into them any more, explaining that he got no benefit from them, as they were too cold. But the people from Arabia said that there was another warm spring in their country, very hot and

health-giving, at a place called Baaru, and urged him to visit this one. So next day we set off for Madeba and later descended into the place called Baaru where the hot spring is. This spot is a deep gorge surrounded on all sides by high mountains, heated by streams of boiling hot water, which spurt up not only from the earth but also from the surrounding crags. The valley is heated to such an extent that the hills around are as black as a chimney from the clouds of smoke hovering perpetually about them. But on all the days when the saint was there the air was so clear and fresh that it seemed as if a dewy breeze was wafting, and all those who had come down with him were amazed, saying, 'Never have we seen such a marvel!'

Another miracle happened to strengthen them in their faith in the following circumstances. The folk who gathered there in winter-time used to collect reeds from the mountain stream which flows down the middle of the valley and make them into shelters. When they left and summer came on, and there was nobody about, then these shelters shrivelled and dried up from the heat. Now finding these ready made the people with us settled down inside. When one of them lighted a fire to prepare his food a spark sprang out and caught the reeds alight. The fire caught the other shelters nearby and turned them to ashes, and the flames darted so high that everyone in the shelters raised cries of alarm from fear of certain doom. Then the saint stepped forth in tears and fearfulness and stretched out his arms to heaven. While his mouth was silent he cried aloud in his heart, like Moses, to the Lord. Praise be to the unspeakable power and love of God! Although nobody could quench the fire with water, and the shelters were reduced in a moment to ashes, they found neither man nor beast, neither pot nor garment destroyed, except for just one donkey's pack saddle, so

that everyone knew that it was the saint's prayer alone which had checked the fire and rescued them.

Now in the city of Gaza there lived a pious scholastic called Dionysius, who was filled with love towards the saint. And he begged Peter to stay in his village, which was called Magdal Tutha, to the south of Gaza nearby the temple of the holy Hilarion, the great ascetic. After he had built a splendid residence for the saint he kept him there for three years.

At this time the blessed Isaiah the Egyptian, that great anchorite and prophet, was living in the neighbourhood, in the village of Beth Daltha, four miles from Father Peter. We must marvel at the trust and love which these saints showed towards one another. Every day the blessed Peter used to send Father Isaiah some victuals suitable for an aged man who was abstemious and frail in body—namely the sort of Gaza bread he used to eat, a bunch of parsley and leeks, cleaned and washed, and two little fishes. In exchange, the other used to send him three cakes.

A.D. 485. While they were living in this way, the Emperor Zeno learnt of the virtue and powers of those saints. As he wanted to receive their blessing,¹ he sent the eunuch Cosmas, one of his favourite chamberlains, with letters to induce them to come to him, promising to let them go again without delay. When he heard of this the blessed Peter was very distressed and fell on his face in front of the holy altar and said, 'Lord, deliver me from the outrages of mankind!' And he decided to travel into the borders of Phoenicia and hide there until he had sent a petition to tell the emperor of his enfeebled state and persuade him to excuse him from so great an

¹Or rather, it would appear, to make these influential hermits sign his *Henoticon*, a formulation of Christian dogma by which he hoped, vainly as it turned out, to reconcile the Chalcedonian and Monophysite groups.

exertion—which indeed came to pass, since our Lord supported the saint's petition.

Then after Whitsun we travelled to Azotus, a place situated on the coast, for the Holy Spirit summoned the saint there for the comfort of those who lived in that town. Though many begged the venerable saint to take up his residence in the middle of the town, he refused and settled down in a narrow and wretched shed by the sea, shorn of any sort of bodily comfort.

While we were living in this shed the saint happened to fall sick. As soon as this came to the ears of Elias the Tribune, who had been the confidant of the Empress Eudocia and now resided in Jerusalem, he was impelled by his anxiety to go down and see Peter. And Elias took him and led him to a place on the outskirts of the town of Yamnia, which lay near the sea, and was excellently suited to the saint's invalid condition. This he did because the resort was crown property, and had once been the residence of the Empress Eudocia.

When we were here, there came round the commemoration day of John the Eunuch, who had been the cell-mate of Father Peter, and had passed away on the 4th of December. According to his custom, Peter invited many people to this festival, especially from the mountain regions round about, and gave orders to buy quantities of fish from the sea nearby. Now it happened that winter came on so suddenly that sea-fishing had to be completely abandoned. We were troubled because we could not entertain the brethren as the saint had instructed. But suddenly shortage turned to plenty. During the night so much rain fell that the river which flowed near us flooded its banks and inundated the vineyards round about. In the morning such shoals of fish were picked up that the local people said they could never remember such a prodigy, and we could not cope with

all the fish who had come to attend the commemoration feast of that holy man.

Now the time was drawing near for the blessed one to find rest and be called to Jesus whom he loved—a time to us unknown and unexpected, but to him long announced in advance; for us, an event grievous and painful, for him a cherished moment awaited with joy, since he yearned to reach that goal which is the crown of God's heavenly call. He made his will, in which he named four heirs: John the Deacon, known as the Qanopite, and with him, his cell-mates Zacharias and Andrew, as well as the scholastic Theodore of Ascalon. He bid us remain fast until death in the orthodox faith and to shun and curse all heresies, namely the synod of Chalcedon and the godless *Tome* of Pope Leo.—'In addition to steadfastness in the faith, take care to attain purity of soul and body, without which no man can see the Lord, and love towards one another, and the concord which comes from the heart and flows from a clear conscience and untarnished belief. Beware of indiscreet talk either with men outside or amongst yourselves, for unrestrained frankness inflames the passions. Meditate on the writings of the saintly bishop Basil concerning the ascetic life, and model your manners and conduct according to his holy precepts. For these writings were brought into being by divine grace for the inculcation of virtue and the edifying of monastic communities everywhere.'

All that day we fasted, and we remained until evening in heavy sorrow and grief, while the blessed one was now preparing himself for his end and holding converse with the Lord. When evening came we sat down at table to eat. In the middle of the meal, Euphrosynus, an honoured monk whom the saint loved and who was by his side looking after him, cried out, 'The father is dying!

Come and receive his blessing !' Then we sprang up from table and hurried sorrowfully to his bedside. So that we should not hurt the blessed one, who was breathing his last, Euphrosynus took the saint's right hand and gave it to each one to kiss and receive the benediction. When the blessed one in happy tranquillity had entrusted his spirit into the hands of God, who even now was near him and bore him away, it was Father Gregory who closed his eyes for the last time.

It was now the dead of night, and soon Friday was about to dawn. When morning came we shrouded the saint's body according to the custom and laid it before the holy altar, so that the holy sacraments might be celebrated in his memory. Afterwards we, his heirs, hastened to take his body and lay it to rest in his old cloister which lies in the neighbourhood of Mayuma by Gaza. For we feared that if the townspeople of Gaza and Mayuma came to hear of it beforehand, they might be impelled by the great trust and love they bore him to carry off his sacred body and inter it in one of the churches in those towns. So we carried away the body of the pious departed. After spending a short time in a monastery on the outskirts of Ascalon, we went on all night and came before daybreak to the saint's old cloister. Now while the blessed one was still living here in quietness, he had erected three burial urns, into the middle one of which we now laid to rest his sacred body. In the right-hand urn reposed the holy relics of Father John the Eunuch, and on the left, those of Father Abraham, a pious hermit from Athribis.

When morning came the townspeople of Mayuma and Gaza heard of the death of the blessed one and the interment of his body. They hurried in a crowd to the cloister and fell down and prayed beside his sacred urn and kissed and embraced it like children bereaved not

only of a father, but also of a teacher, guide and pastor. They remained assembled for seven days, holding vigil over him to the sound of hymns and liturgies, and seeking consolation for the grief they felt at his departing.

Our blessed father and bishop Peter died on the 1st of December, as Sunday was about to dawn,¹ on the third day of the commemoration of Peter, the great martyr and archbishop of Alexandria, and five months after the passing of Father Isaiah the ascetic. And a year later, on the day before the commemoration feast of Father Peter, we reinterred his body in the crypt beneath the altar of the monastery church. The span of his life on earth was about eighty years. We celebrate his memory during three days: the first being the anniversary of the translation of his relics to the crypt beneath the altar, the second, that of the assembly of the people, and the third, the day of his burial in the earth and his committal into the hands of Christ Jesus, our Lord, God over all things, to whom be praise, honour and power to all eternity, Amen.

¹Earlier we have been told that it was not Sunday, but Friday which was about to dawn when Peter died. This confusion makes it difficult to establish the exact date of Peter's death, which must have occurred between the years 488 and 491.

CHAPTER 5

A FORERUNNER OF ST. FRANCIS: DAVID OF GARESJA

THE life of St. David, founder of the David-Garejeli monastery in Eastern Georgia, belongs to the cycle of biographies known as *The Lives of the Syrian Fathers*, most of which were composed by the Catholicos Arsenius II of Georgia (c. 955-80). To these Syrian Fathers is ascribed the introduction of monastic institutions into Georgia. The historical background of their mission has been the subject of considerable discussion, especially as their biographies, in their present form, were not composed until four centuries after their deaths, with the result that facts are overlaid with legend and myth.

The approximate date of the Syrian Fathers' mission to Georgia can, however, be established by references to real personages and events. Thus, the life of St. David of Garesja mentions the Patriarch Elias of Jerusalem (494-513). Lives of the twelve other Syrian Fathers refer to a visit to St. Simeon Stylites the Younger (521-97), who is described as sitting in an oven, which he is known to have done between the years 541 and 551. There is also a reference to the Persian king Khusrau's siege of Edessa, which took place in 544. The Georgian chronicle known as *The Conversion of Georgia* says that the Syrian Fathers arrived some two hundred years after St. Nino's apostolate. These allusions combine to show that the Syrian Fathers arrived, or were traditionally supposed to

have arrived in the Caucasus at various times between the end of the 5th and the middle of the 6th centuries.

While the Syrian Fathers are revered among the fathers of the Orthodox Georgian Church there can be no doubt that they belonged to the Monophysite persuasion, as did Peter the Iberian, whose life we have read in the last chapter. Syria was a great centre of opposition to the edicts of the Council of Chalcedon. We have already seen with what vigour the Emperor Marcian (450-57) persecuted those who refused to accept the Chalcedonian formulation of the doctrine of Christ's two natures. After a period of respite under Zeno and Anastasius, there was a fresh outburst of persecution between the years 520 and 545 under Justin I and Justinian. Contemporary annalists give a lurid picture of the excesses committed by the Byzantine authorities against the Syrian clergy and monks, many of whom were forced to flee abroad.

We also have to bear in mind that at the period under review the Georgian Church was itself sympathetic to the Monophysite cause. At the Council of Dvin in 506, the Armenian, Georgian and Albano-Caucasian Churches united in condemning the dogma laid down at Chalcedon. Not until a century later did the Georgian Catholicos Kyrion formally reject the Armenian Gregorian doctrine and bring his flock back for ever within the Orthodox fold.

When we recall that the Syrian Fathers arrived in Georgia at a time when Monophysite monks expelled from Syria were taking refuge abroad, and that the Georgian Church was then on the Monophysite side, we must conclude that the Syrian Fathers were indeed Monophysite refugees anxious to continue their religious work in the more tolerant and congenial atmosphere of Georgia.

In general, the Syrian Fathers are pictured as lovers of a hermit's solitary life. But they were by no means misanthropic in outlook. St. Iese of Tsilkani, for instance, obliged his parishioners by diverting the river Ksani to run through their town. Several of the Fathers were distinguished by their love of animals. St. John Zedazneli made friends with bears near his hermitage. St. Shio employed an obliging but rather inefficient wolf to guide the donkeys which brought supplies to his lonely grotto. But it is perhaps in the life of St. David here translated that the good relations existing between the Syrian Fathers and the animal world are brought out in the most touching and vivid light.

The First Thursday after Ascension Day
The Life and Acts of our Holy Father
David of Garesja

The homeland of this worthy and marvel-working Father was the Mesopotamian valley of Assyria, from which there have stemmed such a host of excellent and saintly men fertilized by the Holy Ghost and made into a spring-sown field of spiritual grace. But I could not discover when the saint was born, nor who were the parents from whom he received fleshly birth and upbringing, though we may assume that this noble branch sprang from excellent roots. As the good tree brings forth good fruit, so did the saint by his fruit make known the quality of his forbears.

Although I am ignorant of the names of his corporeal parents, his spiritual father is well known to all, namely the wondrous and noble John Zedazneli. This blessed Father John was from the borders of Antioch in the land of Mesopotamia. And by the guidance of the Holy Ghost, he arrived in this country of Georgia nearby the sacred capital city of Mtskheta. He longed for a hermit's

life, and said to his disciples, 'My sons, why do you stand idle? Do you not know that the Lord Jesus Christ has sent and guided us here for the benefit of this country? For this is a virgin land. Now it is time for you to go away separately and strengthen our brethren to walk in Christ's ways.'

So our holy father David departed to dwell in desolate and waterless places, so that by an ascetic way of life in this transitory world, he might win for himself eternal bliss and rest everlasting. He therefore chose to live outside in the wilderness, and for this reason his desert abode is called *Garesja*.¹ He took with him one disciple, Lucian by name.

When they had arrived in this uninhabited and waterless place they became very thirsty. Then they found a little rain water which had collected in a crack in a rock, so they drank some of it and lay down to rest in the shadow of the rock. Afterwards they walked this way and that, and found a cave in the crag and settled down in it. Whenever it became sultry or rained they rested in the cave. For food they collected roots and grass, as it was spring time, and plenty of nourishment for the flesh was to be found. So they collected provisions and glorified God, the giver of all good things.

After some days had passed, the meadows became withered and burnt up because summer had arrived. Suddenly there came three deer, followed by their fawns, and stood before them like peaceable sheep. Father David said, 'Brother Lucian, take a dish and milk these deer.' And he got up and milked them. When the dish was full he took it up to the hermit. And he made the sign of the cross and it turned into curds, and they ate them and were filled, and glorified God. After that the deer came every day, except for Wednesdays and Fri-

¹From Georgian *gare*, 'outside' and *jdoma*, 'to sit.'

days, and brought their fawns with them, so that they were contented in body and joyful in spirit.

But underneath, close by the cave where the saints resided, there was another cave, in which was a large and fearsome dragon with bloodshot eyes and a horn growing out of his forehead, and a great mane on his neck. One day the deer were going by the entrance to the cave when the dragon attacked them and seized a fawn and swallowed it. The terrified deer ran to the hermit and trembled. When Lucian saw them shivering with fright he said to St. David, 'Holy Father, these deer have come flying to us and are shaking with terror, and they have left one of their fawns behind.' So the hermit went out with his staff in his hand. When he had reached the place past which the deer had come, he saw the dragon and said, 'Evil dragon, why have you harmed our deer, which God has given us to comfort our weak flesh? Now depart from here and go far away into the desert. If you do not obey me, then by the power of our Lord Jesus Christ I will rip open your stomach with this staff of mine and turn you into food for the mice.'

But the dragon exclaimed, 'Do not be angry, O servant of God Almighty! If you want me to go away from here, lead me up to the top of that mountain, and promise that you will not take your eyes off me until I have reached the river which flows on the south side of the hills, because I am afraid of thunderbolts and cannot endure them.' St. David gave his promise, and the dragon set out with St. David escorting him and reciting a psalm. And the rocks of that place wobbled from the tread of the dragon.

When Lucian saw this, he was afraid, and fell on his face and lay as if dead. And St. David led the dragon up as far as the top of the mountain, and the dragon began to scramble up to the peak. When the dragon had

left the plain, St. David set off back towards his desert abode keeping his eye on the dragon. But the angel of the Lord spoke from behind him and said, 'David!' So he looked round, and as he turned the dragon was struck by a thunderbolt and completely burnt up.

When St. David saw this he was very sorry and said, 'O Lord, King of Glory, why didst Thou kill this dragon which put its trust in me, in spite of which Thou hast relentlessly destroyed him?' Then the angel of the Lord said to him, 'Why are you sorry, O virtuous follower of our Lord Jesus Christ? For if the dragon had entered the river waters, he would have passed on into the sea. By eating the fish there, he would have grown enormous in size, and have overturned many ships in the ocean and destroyed many living souls in the seas. So do not grieve because the Lord has shown His mercy in this way, but go to your cavern, because your disciple Lucian has fallen on his face and is lying terror-stricken from fear of the dragon. Stretch out your hand and raise him up and strengthen and fortify him, and both together glorify God who has freed you from the fear of that detestable monster of a dragon.'

On this the angel departed. David went and found Lucian quaking with fear, lying on the earth, and he stretched out his hand and raised him up and said, 'Brother Lucian, why were you frightened of a worm, which God has shrivelled up with fire in an instant? Now do not be afraid, for the might of God is with us, and God's grace protects all that fear Him.' So Lucian was cheered by the hermit's words and gave thanks to the Lord.

Then several days went by, after which some huntsmen arrived from the borders of Kakheti, for in that wilderness, even up to the present day, there is abundance of game, including deer and wild goats and a

countless variety of other sorts of game. When the hunters came they spied this way and that and caught sight of the hermit's deer going into the cave in the rock. Then the hunters hastily turned aside to trap them in the cave in the rock. As they reached the hermit's cavern they saw the deer standing while St. Lucian milked them. When the men saw this, they were stricken with fear and ran in and fell at the feet of the holy hermit and said to him, 'How is it, Holy Father, that these deer, wild animals of the field, are so tame as to be more peaceable than sheep brought up in a domestic farmyard?'

He said to them, 'Why are you astonished at the glories of God? Do you not know that He tamed lions for Daniel, and saved the three children unharmed from the fiery furnace? So what is so wonderful about these deer? Now go and hunt other game, for these animals are granted by God for our feeble flesh.'

But they replied, 'Great is the glory of the Lord; it is fitting for us also to share in your holy way of life, saintly Father.' Their hearts were stirred, and they wept and said, 'We will not return home again, but shall remain here with you and not leave you any more.'

But the hermit said to them, 'My sons and brothers, this place is uncomfortable and confined. You had better go home.' And with difficulty he managed to persuade them to depart.

When they had finished hunting they went away and spread the news through all that country. From all sides people hastened to St. David's presence and begged to be deemed worthy to stay with him. But he said in reply, 'Brothers, this place is lacking in comfort, and no food for the body is to be found in these parts.' But they entreated him, saying, 'Do not abandon us, Holy Father. If death should overcome us in your presence it would not seem like death to us.' When he had failed to per-

suade them, he said, 'Since you have been granted faith in God, go and fetch spades and dig water cisterns, and also caves to live in.' And they obeyed him and did what he told them.

After the brethren had gathered together, a worthy and virtuous monk, Father Dodo, heard this news. He also came before David, and they greeted one another. When a few days had gone by, a large number of other brethren collected, and David said to Father Dodo, 'Go, Brother, to the spur of that crag which stands opposite us, and take with you the other brethren, for they wish to be mortified externally in the flesh for the sake of the life of their souls.' St. Dodo obeyed his command and went and built the hermitage which is called after our most holy Queen, the Mother of God, to the glory of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and from day to day the number of the brethren increased and all together they glorified God.

The holy father David came out every day to the caves in the cliff and there peacefully offered up sacred prayers, and with his sweat and tears watered those places as with a spring. One day when he was praying thus, there arrived a certain man belonging to a tribe of barbarians from the district of Rustavi, and he was hunting game. Now his hawk brought down a partridge near the place where St. David was praying, and the partridge took refuge by the hermit and perched by his feet, and the hawk perched close by. This was by divine intent, so that this hunter should himself be hunted by the grace of God. Then the barbarian hurried up to take the partridge from the hawk.

When he saw the saint standing in prayer, and the partridge sitting by his feet, the barbarian was amazed, and said, 'Who are you?' David replied in the Armenian language, 'I am a sinful man, a servant of our Lord Jesus

Christ, and I am imploring His mercy, to forgive me all my sins, so that I may leave this transitory life in peace and quietness.' Then he asked again, 'Who looks after you and feeds you here?' David replied, 'He whom I believe in and worship looks after and feeds all His creatures, to whom He has given birth. By Him are brought up all men and all animals and all plants, the birds of the sky and the fishes of the sea. Behold, this partridge which was fleeing from your hawk has taken refuge with me, the sinful servant of God. Now go away and hunt other game, for today it has found a haven with me, so that it may be saved from death.'

The barbarian replied, 'I intend to kill you, so how do you expect to save the partridge from death?' But St. David said, 'You can kill neither me nor the partridge, for my God is with me and He is powerful to protect.'

At this word of the saint the barbarian, who was on horseback, drew his sword to strike St. David on the neck. When he raised his arm, suddenly it withered away and became like wood. Then the barbarian realized his wickedness and got down from his horse and fell at the hermit's feet, and begged him with tears to rescue him from the error of his ways.

Then St. David had pity on him and besought the Lord, saying, 'Lord Jesus Christ, our God, who didst come down to give life to the human race, Kind and Merciful One who didst cure the hand that was withered up—likewise, O Heavenly King, just as Thou didst see fit to do this, so cure the arm of this barbarian, that he may understand and recognize Thee and glorify Thy name.' Then the saint took his hand, and when he touched it, in an instant it was healed by the grace of God.

When he witnessed the might of God he began to

entreat him greatly with burning tears and said to St. David, 'O servant of the Living God, my son at home is lame in both legs and completely unable to get up. Now I place my trust in your saintly virtues that you may pray for him to the Lord. If he is cured, then God's kindness will be all the more glorified, and I will bring the child before your holy presence to be blessed by you, and I and all my household will worship the name of Jesus Christ. I will present you with abundant provisions, and you and all your followers will be generously provided with the fruits of my estate.'

St. David answered and said to him, 'Go to your house, and if it please God, you will find your son cured.' So he went home in a cheerful mood, especially as he had had a successful day's hunting. When he arrived at his home—Behold now Thy wondrous works, O Christ!—this lame child of his, which used to crawl on all fours, walked happily out to meet his father! When his father saw him completely restored and perfect in limb he got off his horse and offered up thanks to God.

When it was dawn he loaded donkeys with great quantities of stores, including bread and vegetables, and went out to the holy hermit, bringing his son and two other children of his to receive his blessing. Then St. David collected all the brethren together and fed them with the stores he had brought. When they rose from dinner, Father David asked whether he had any boon to ask of him, and he begged to be accorded holy baptism. Then St. David told him to take some of the provisions and go to Father Dodo and feed also the brethren who were there and receive their blessing too. And the worthy Father Dodo gave a joyful and cordial welcome to the barbarian man and his children and servants, and blessed them. In accordance with Father David's orders he gave them a priest, from whom he and all his family

received baptism, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

A certain time elapsed, and the assembled brethren became very numerous. Then the blessed David summoned his disciple Lucian and said, 'Brother Lucian, if it be pleasing to God, I want to go to the holy city of Jerusalem to pray at the Holy Places and worship at the life-giving sepulchre of our Lord Jesus Christ.' With some difficulty he managed to persuade Lucian to remain with the brethren, and he himself set off for Jerusalem, accompanied by a few of the brothers.

When they had arrived at the place which is called the Hill of Mercy, from which the city of God, the holy Jerusalem, can be seen, they all raised their arms towards heaven and offered up thanks to God. But when St. David saw Jerusalem he fell upon the ground and said to them, 'No, brethren, I may venture to advance no further from this spot, for I judge myself unworthy even to approach those holy places. But you go and pray for me, a sinner.'

After he had spent much time there in praying and lamenting, bowed down towards the earth, he picked up three stones and packed them in his scrip as sacred relics, as if they had been hewn from the very sepulchre of Christ. After this he turned round and walked joyfully along the road which leads to Garesja. But God, astonished at his candour and faith, wished to make manifest the renown of His servant, who from excess of sincerity did not dare to enter Jerusalem. So that night He sent an angel to speak in a vision to Elias, Patriarch of Jerusalem, saying :

'There is come as far as my city of Jerusalem my own particular servant David, and by his faith he has carried away with him the grace and favour of Jerusalem. So now send runners out swiftly to catch up with him,

for he is going along the road leading away from the city dressed in a felt cloak. He has an old scrip in which there are three stones which he has taken as sacred relics from the place whence he turned back. Tell those men to take these stones away from him and give him back one only, and they are to speak to him as follows : Thus the Lord commands you—Through your faith, you have taken away the grace and favour from my holy city of Jerusalem, but it has seemed good to me to restore two parts to Jerusalem, so that the city may not be entirely excluded from my mercies ; but I will present a third of it to you to take back to your wilderness. Go then in peace and take this stone as a sacred relic to your hermitage, as a memorial and a testimony to your faith.'

When the Patriarch had seen all these things in his dream he started up out of his sleep and immediately summoned swift messengers and told them everything he had seen and heard from the angel in the vision. So they left the city and quickly went about their errand, and overtook the holy father David and informed him of everything the Patriarch had told them. In the scrip which he carried with him they found the three stones, and they took two of them away from him. But one they gave him back as the Patriarch Elias had directed them. Some time later, St. David reached his hermitage, and all the brethren greeted him with joy and good wishes when they heard of the arrival of their spiritual shepherd. And even today that stone remains in the hermitage, effecting great miracles of healing right up to the present time.

And David, this great shepherd and father of ours, went out from day to day to visit and encourage the brothers who lived in remote parts, and strengthen them in the campaign of virtue. Now when a considerable time had passed in this way, his ship was full of the good

cargo and inexhaustible riches of virtue, and it was time for it to be carried up to the heavenly shores above. So he summoned all the brethren whom he had gathered together and instructed them with words of paternal exhortation. Afterwards he partook of the immaculate and immortal mysteries of Christ, being the sacred flesh and holy blood of our Lord Jesus. Then he raised up his hands towards God and committed his soul to Him, and relinquished his body, worn out with much toil, to be committed as earth to earth, while the brothers who had gathered round wept bitterly over the loss of their good shepherd.

CHAPTER 6

THE PASSION OF ST. EUSTACE THE COBBLER

THE martyrdom of Eustace of Mtskheta represents one of the most important documents of early Georgian history. It gives a vivid picture of the relationship existing between Christian Georgia and Sasanian Iran in the reign of Khusrau Anushirvan (531-79), and has come down to us in a relatively unaltered form from the late 6th century, when it was composed by an anonymous writer. Many Iranian names are preserved in their original guise with surprisingly little corruption, and the absence of miracles enhances the narrative's authenticity.

Of special interest is the Christian apologia put into the mouth of Archdeacon Samuel, and repeated by St. Eustace before his accusers. As long ago as 1901, Adolf von Harnack published in the Proceedings of the Berlin Academy a German rendering of the text, with a detailed commentary in which he pointed out its many divergences from the literal text of the Bible and emphasized its significance for biblical studies. He paid special attention to the curious formulation of the Ten Commandments, as well as to certain elements in Samuel's account of the life of Christ which recall Tatian's *Diatessaron* and suggest that the Georgian Church in early times possessed a *Diatessaron* of its own. However this may be, Samuel's apologia is of the greatest interest as showing the way in which the Christian faith was expounded among Persian and Georgian Christians in Sasanian times.

The Passion of St. Eustace is here translated unabridged from the revised text recently published at Tiflis in the chrestomathies edited by Qubaneishvili and Imnaishvili, who have based their editions on some eight manuscripts, the earliest being of the 11th century.

JULY 29TH. Martyrdom and Passion of
St. Eustace of Mtskheta

A.D. 540-41. In the tenth year of King Khusrau's reign when Arvand Gushnasp was Marzapan (Governor-General) of Georgia, a certain man arrived from Persia, from the province of the Arshakids; son of a Magian was he, and a pagan. His name was Gvirobandak, and he was a young man of about thirty.

He came to the city of Mtskheta and set himself to learn the shoemaker's craft. He saw the Christians celebrating their services and worshipping Christ, and witnessed the manifestation of the power of the Holy Cross. He became fond of the Christian faith, and came to believe in Christ. When he had learnt the shoemaker's craft, he sought the hand of a Christian wife and himself became a Christian and received baptism. On being baptized he was christened Eustace. And the holy Eustace abode in Christian faith and virtue.

At that season the Persians who lived in Mtskheta, cobblers and shoemakers by trade, used to assemble for their festival. So they sent for the blessed Eustace and said to him, 'Come and join in this celebration of ours.' But the blessed Eustace laughed at them and said, 'Your festival is dismal, and you, its celebrators, are a dismal crowd. But the seal of the baptism of Christ has been imprinted on me, and I make merry at Christ's feast; for I am stamped with the mark of Christ, and stand aloof from such dismal festivities as yours.'

When they had celebrated their festival, those cob-

blers and shoemakers assembled and gave voice before Wistam, the commandant who was set over Mtskheta castle, and said, 'There is a man here belonging to our faith who refuses to come to our festival. He pays no respect to the sacred fire and pours scorn on our cult and rails at us and says: I am a Christian. Now you summon him and interrogate him, for you exercise authority over this city.'

Wistam, the commandant of Mtskheta castle, listened to what they had to say about Eustace and sent one of his horsemen to call the blessed Eustace to him. The horseman told him brusquely, 'The castle commandant is calling for you.'

The holy Eustace was somewhat confused and wanted to run away, but then took thought and said, 'These are my comrades—if I am afraid of them, how shall I stand up to great princes? Rather will I go to him and openly confess Christ, as I have learnt from the Holy Gospel, where He said: He who confesses me before men, I will confess also before my Father which is in heaven, and whoever denies me before men, him I will deny also before my Father which is in heaven.' And he made the sign of the cross over his brow and his heart and said, 'The Lord be with me.'

So the blessed Eustace came and stood in front of Wistam, the commandant of Mtskheta castle, and the man who had fetched him said to Wistam, 'This is the fellow who rails at our creed.' The commandant glanced at the blessed Eustace and said, 'Now look you, my man, tell me what province you are from or what city, and what faith you belong to?'

St. Eustace said to him, 'I used to live in the land of Persia, in the province of the Arshakids, in the town of Gandzak. My father was a Magian and he instructed me also in the creed of the Magians. But I did not adopt

the Magian creed, for in the city of Gandzak the Christians are in the majority, with their own bishop and priests, and from them I learnt beyond all manner of doubt that Christianity, the greatest of religions, is above all pagan beliefs. Now I believe in Christ and abide in Christ's service.'

Then Wistam the castle commandant said to him, 'No one will give you permission to exercise the Christian cult. If you will not be quiet and forsake this lunacy of yours, then great torment is in store for you.'

St. Eustace replied, 'Not only am I ready to face torture for the love of Christ, but I will not even seek to avoid death.'

When Wistam observed the blessed Eustace's steadfast resolve he meditated and said, 'I have no authority to punish this man either by crucifying him or by imprisonment. I had better send him to the city of Tiflis to Arvand Gushnasp, the Marzapan of Georgia, for him to do with him whatever is expedient; for it is he who holds the right of life and death over every man in Georgia.'

So Wistam, the commandant of Mtskheta castle, gave orders to two of his horsemen to take the blessed Eustace to Tiflis. Then those same cobblers and shoemakers assembled and came to Wistam and said, 'There are also some other men of our creed here who have turned Christians. So order them to be summoned and sent to Tiflis as well.' Wistam said to them, 'Who are they?' They told him their names and said, 'One of them is called Gushnak and one Bakhdiad, one Borzo, one Panagushnasp, one Perozak, one Zarmil and one Stephen.'

Wistam had them summoned but did not subject them to interrogation, merely commanding the eight of them to be bound and handed over to Arvand Gushnasp, the

Marzapan of Georgia, at Tiflis. He reported to him in the following terms, 'These men used to belong to our faith, but now belong to the Christian religion. I have arrested them and sent them to you, my lord, because you have the authority to interrogate them.'

So these eight appeared before the Marzapan, who said to them, 'Where are you from and what creed do you belong to?' Then each one declared his native land and place of birth, and all of them stated, 'In our homeland we belonged to the faith of our fathers and followed the Persian religion, but when we migrated to Georgia and witnessed the faith of the Christians, we became Christians and are Christians now, for the faith of the Christians is holy and fragrant and passing excellent and beautiful, and no other creed can compare with that of the Christians.'

Their spokesman before the judge was the blessed Eustace. And when the judge heard these words of theirs he was enraged and ordered his retainers to strike these saints on the face and take them all away, and he commanded, 'Shave their heads and beards and pierce their noses and fix chains on their necks and fetter their legs and lock them up in jail. If any one of them will profess the faith of his fathers, release him and bring him to me, and I will enrich him with generous presents. But any one who will not profess the creed of his fathers shall die in prison.'

When they heard the words of the Marzapan—'Whoever professes the faith of his fathers I will let live, and whoever will not profess it shall die in prison'—then the devil entered into the hearts of Bakhdiad and Panagushnasp and they denied Christ and professed paganism. So they took the side of the crucifiers of Jesus, but the blessed Eustace and Gushnak and Borzo and Perozak and Zarmil and Stephen clung firmly and steadfastly to the faith of Christ.

When they told the Marzapan that two of the men had reverted to the faith of their fathers, the Marzapan was pleased and had them brought to him and seated them by his side and promised them a valuable reward and handsome treatment. But he ordered the blessed Eustace and his other companions to have their heads and beards shaved and chains hung round their necks, and to be kept fettered in prison. And the retainers carried out the Marzapan's orders and shaved off their hair and beards and fettered them and locked them up in prison. Bakhdiad and Panagushnasp, on the other hand, he entertained and let go; but of the reward and handsome compensation he had promised them he gave them not one farthing.

St. Eustace and his other companions stayed in prison for six months. After six months had passed a courier arrived to summon Arvand Gushnasp to the king of the Persians. When the Marzapan was setting out to go to the king the princes of Georgia assembled to say farewell to him. As the Marzapan was mounting his horse the princes of Georgia, Samuel the Catholicos of Georgia, Gregory the Mamasakhlisi¹ of Georgia, Arshusha the Pitiakhsh of Georgia, and other scions of princely families, arose and said to the Marzapan, 'We beg you to grant us the privilege of asking you one boon.' So he said to them, 'Tell me what it is you want. What have I failed to grant you?' And they all said, 'We beg you, my lord, to see your way to freeing those men from Mtskheta who have been imprisoned on account of their adherence to the Christian faith.' The Marzapan said to them, 'Those men were to be put to death, but as a result of your intercession I will set them free.' They thanked him. And he ordered them to be released, and they were brought out of jail.

¹*Mamasakhlisi*: literally 'Father of the House,' i.e. head of a clan, an ancient Georgian title dating from patriarchal times.

So those blessed ones came home as Christians and lived a life pleasing to God. And by God's command some of them have passed away at various times, while others are still alive. But of those who denied Christ, Bakhdiad was seized with a devil and came to a bad end, while the wretched Panagushnasp passed his days in poverty, without bread to eat or clothes to cover his body, and as long as he lived, his days were full of misery and woe.

A.D. 544-45. Three years later Vezhan Buzmir came to be Marzapan of Georgia. Then the Persians who had denounced the blessed Eustace came from Mtskheta to Tiflis and appeared before Vezhan Buzmir the Marzapan and said, 'There are some men at Mtskheta who belong to our faith but have seceded from us and live as Christians. Now it is you who have the authority to try them.' So Vezhan Buzmir ordered two horsemen to go and summon St. Eustace and Stephen. When the horsemen came they said to Eustace and Stephen, 'The Marzapan calls you.' And they said, 'We will come with you; we are neither troubled nor afraid of anything.'

When Eustace and Stephen were setting out for Tiflis, Eustace said to his mother-in-law and his wife and his children and servants, 'I bid you farewell, for I shall return here no more. I will not deny Christ, and they will never let me go alive. My death awaits me in Tiflis jail. My head will be cut off, but by God's will my body will return hither.'

After he had spoken thus he took leave of them all. And they all made the sign of the cross, and he and Stephen set out for Tiflis in company with the horsemen. But their household, relatives and family followed them and wept. As they were passing into open country and had arrived in front of the Cross of Mtskheta, St. Eustace lifted up his hands and said, 'O Lord God Jesus Christ,

if I am deemed worthy to die as a Christian for Thy name's sake, do not abandon my body to be cast out and eaten up by dogs and the birds of the air, but ordain that my corpse may return here and be buried at Mtskheta where I was baptized.' After the blessed Eustace had uttered these words he bowed down before the Cross, said farewell to his assembled dear ones, and started out for Tiflis.

When the horsemen arrived there they brought Eustace and Stephen before Vezhan Buzmir the Marzapan and said, 'Here are these Christian proselytes from Mtskheta.' Vezhan Buzmir said to Eustace and Stephen, 'Where are you from? What faith do you belong to?' Then certain men who were Assyrian princes stood up for Stephen and said, 'We know this man—he is a countryman of ours. His father and mother and brothers and sisters are Christians, and he is a Christian too.' As a result of this declaration, Stephen was freed, but the Marzapan said to St. Eustace, 'Where are you from? What creed do you live by?'

St. Eustace said to him, 'If you are curious to know, then listen patiently and I will tell you everything. I used to belong to the land of Persia, the country of the Arshakids, the city of Gandzak. My father was a Magian, my brothers were Magians, and my father instructed me in the Magian religion also. But I had no love for the faith of my fathers, and I said in my mind: I do not like this creed. Now let me listen to that of the Jews and the Christians, and whichever is best, that faith I will adopt. By day my father would instruct me in the Magian religion, but at night when the Christians rang the bell I used to go and listen to their liturgy and observe the service which the Christians performed in honour of God. I also went with the Jews into their temple and watched their service. But in the prayers of the Christians I heard

their voices as the voices of angels, and exceedingly fragrant and pleasant is their liturgy. But when at night I went into the Jews' temple, I could not understand what they were saying.

'Afterwards I went back again, and Archdeacon Samuel, a man learned in the faith, approached me and said, "Why do you come to church so assiduously?" But I said to him, "Master, you know what class of man I am, but I do not like this faith of my fathers, and I want someone to explain to me the faith of the Jews and that of the Christians, and whichever creed be the holier, that I will adopt."

'Then Archdeacon Samuel said to me, "If you are really anxious to know, I will give you a thorough account of both faiths. However, the choice is not yours, but it is as the Lord may ordain." But I besought him greatly and said to him, "By whichever faith I may make myself pleasing to God, that faith I will adopt, so expound that one to me."

'Archdeacon Samuel began to speak and said to me, "Listen to me patiently, my brother! First there was the religion of the Persians, as you yourself know, but God hated that religion of the Persians and it was not pleasing to Him. Then God chose the Jews and they were pleasing to Him and He gave them a religion and an ordinance to keep. But later God came to favour the Christians more than the Jews."

'I besought Archdeacon Samuel and said, "Master, do not let my importunity offend you, but pray teach me thoroughly." And again I asked, "Master, who were the Jews, where did they come from, and how did God come to love them?"

'Then Archdeacon Samuel said to me, The story of the Jews is a long one, brother, but if you will give me your attention and listen patiently, I will tell you every-

thing and ungrudgingly instruct you.—There was a man, innocent and a lover of God, in the land of the Persians and the city of Babylon, and his name was Abraham. God appeared to him in a vision at night and said to Abraham, “Depart from this land and I will lead you into another country and cause you to multiply and increase greatly, and make you the father of many tribes and countless peoples.” Abraham believed in this word of God and said, “Let Thy word be accomplished upon me, O Lord!” And Abraham set forth from his homeland, the country of the Chaldees, and came to the land of Mesopotamia, to the town of Haran nearby the Euphrates. *He came under the guidance of angels and settled in Haran, and then moved on from there and was led to the land of Canaan and settled in Hebron. Abraham begot Isaac, and Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob had twelve sons. God commanded Abraham, saying, “Circumcize Isaac and Jacob and all the sons of Jacob, and let this be your rule for ever.”*

‘Abraham acted according to God’s command, and the seed of Abraham increased and multiplied greatly. These are the Jews. God loved the Jews very much, as a father loves a favourite son. He called the Jews by the name of Israel, and Israel may be interpreted to mean: The People of God. This people of God, Israel, became great and extensive.

‘Then God came down from heaven to earth and descended upon the summit of Mount Sinai; and God wrote a law and commandment with His own hand upon stone tablets, as follows:—*The first commandment thus—Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. And then—Do not commit murder; do not steal; do not commit adultery; do not lust after your neighbour’s wife; do not bear false witness; do not utter slanders; do not equivocate; honour*

your father and your mother; love your neighbour as yourself; observe my sabbath days and celebrate festivals and sacrifices and holy days. God wrote this law and commandment and gave it to His servant Moses. And Moses brought the tablets and read them aloud to all Israel. Then all Israel rejoiced and said, "We will perform and carry out everything that the Lord has commanded us so long as the Lord abides with us." Then the Lord rose up into heaven. After the Jews had heard this law, they offered up sacrifices and incense and burnt offerings, and observed the sabbath, and God was with them.

"Then foreign tribes assembled and fell upon Israel; but God overcame them by the hand of one man, and some were killed, some taken prisoner, and others sought refuge in flight. So they were kept safe from their foes, because God was with them.

"Some time afterwards, all Israel asked God for a king to combat their enemies; and God allotted them a king and laid down the rite for his consecration. After a space of time, the king perished in battle, because he had elevated himself and placed his hope in his own strength and not in his God.

"Then David reigned, and David also was beloved of God; and David loved God and offered up oblations and sacrifices and burnt offerings and faithfully observed the festivals and sabbath days. After him, his son Solomon reigned, but he abandoned God and the people renounced Him and deserted Him and served deaf idols, fashioned by human hands, and inanimate stones, trees, timbers and high branches, and they denied God.

"The prophets cried out and said, "It is not fitting to forsake the Living God and serve stones or any other things. Now behold, God will bring down upon you death and hunger and the sword and captivity, and so

will destroy you !” But they would not listen to the voice of the prophets, for the people of Israel were demented. And they ordered the prophets to be put to death, some by the sword, some by fire, some they dismembered with saws, some they threw to wild beasts and some they cast into dungeons and some they crushed with stones.

‘But God is tender and merciful and did not wish to annihilate Israel, desiring rather its conversion. So God sent His own Son Christ on to the earth, and He entered into the womb of a holy virgin and was clothed in flesh and made man from the Holy Mary ; and He came from the womb of the Holy One, and the Godhead was incarnate. If the Godhead had not been incarnate, mankind could not have drawn near to God.—As the sun is created by God and no one can fix his eyes upon it, and no one may gaze on the sun’s globe, similarly mankind could not draw near to the Godhead.—Therefore He put on the flesh, so that Israel might turn to the Living God. Being made man, He was baptized by the hand of John in the river Jordan. When He came out of the water, behold the heavens were opened and the Holy Ghost, like a white dove, came down and settled upon Him and a voice was heard from above saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear him and live.”

‘When He came to Jerusalem, He began to perform miracles and prodigies and feats of healing. He saw a man who had lain sick for thirty-eight years on his couch, and commanded him with the words, “Arise and take up your bed and walk !” Then he arose immediately and walked nimbly and glorified God. Afterwards He found one who was blind from birth, and He made clay with his spittle, rubbed it on his eyes and told him to wash them with water, and the eyes of the blind man were opened. And He raised up the dead, restored the

lame and cleansed the lepers, and many cures did Christ effect among them in order to convince the Jews and turn them towards the Living God ; for He desired that they should not cut themselves off from God.

'But the Jews were more and more filled with wrath and excited by jealousy against Christ, and they wanted to kill Him. But Christ avoided them and went about the villages and country places outside. Those whom Christ had converted followed Him. And He came into one village where they were carrying out the corpse of a widow's only son. When He saw it, He ordered the bier to be stopped. Then He took the boy by the hand and restored him alive to his mother.

'Again he came to another village, and a crowd of people surrounded Him. Now there was a cripple whom they could not carry through because of the throng, so they hoisted him on to the roof of the house and let him down together with his bed. And He raised him up, and he went home on his own feet. There was a great crowd round about Him, and they glorified God. And from the multitude He chose twelve men and called them His disciples ; whatever He commanded them, this they used to do.

'He came into one village where a wedding was being celebrated. Jesus entered the place where the festivities were being held, and there was no wine because it had all been drunk up and the jars were standing there empty. Then Jesus ordered His disciples to draw water, and they filled the jars with water, and Christ blessed the water and it was turned to wine more pleasant than the wine they had at first ; and many were amazed and believed in Him and followed Him.

'Afterwards a woman who had been suffering for twelve years from an issue of blood came by stealth behind Jesus and touched the hem of His garment and was healed.

“Then Jesus was going to a certain place where there was a beautiful meadow. And He looked at the people following Him and said to His disciples, “These people have been without food for so many days, and I am sorry for them. Go to the town and buy bread and give it to the people.” But then Christ said to the disciples, “Has none of you any bread here?” One of the disciples said, “I have five loaves and two fishes.” Christ said, “Bring them here.” When they had brought the five loaves and two fishes, Christ commanded the people to sit down on the ground and took up the five loaves and two fishes, blessed and broke them and gave them to His disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. The people ate and were satisfied, and they collected twelve baskets full of what was left over. The number of the people who were fed was about five thousand, besides children and women.

‘Afterwards Christ told the people to walk on farther by dry land, but Christ and His disciples walked upon the sea as if on dry ground, and their feet were not wetted. When they reached dry land, He encountered a man who was beset by a devil who was legion, and he cried out and said, “Christ, succour me, for I am sorely tormented.” Then Christ was wrathful at the devil who was legion, and he left the man, who glorified God ; but the devil cried out and said, “Christ, I know who thou art, the Holy One of God : thou hast come to destroy me.” And Christ commanded the earth and it opened and swallowed him up and he descended into the nether regions of hell.

‘Afterwards He came to the village which is called Bethany, where Lazarus had died four days before and was laid in his tomb. Christ came to the door of the sepulchre and cried out saying, “Lazarus, come forth !” At this one call from Christ’s voice, he came joyfully out

of the tomb. And the multitude were astonished and the people greatly increased in faith abounding.

'After this, Christ went up to Jerusalem and entered the Temple of God and saw a market installed inside and people buying there; and Christ raised a whip and scattered those men and dispersed the market and tipped over the tables and said, "Thus it is written: The house of my Father should be called a house of prayer; but you have turned it into a den of thieves." Again He said, "I will overthrow this temple and on the third day I will build it again." When the Jews heard this, they were greatly angered and said, "We know Joseph his father and Mary his mother, and he has brothers too. But he declares himself to be the son of God and appropriates God's temple for his patrimony." Again they said, "Solomon built it over a space of forty years, and he says he will overthrow it and rebuild it on the third day."

'Because of this speech the Jews were incensed in their hearts, and their spirit was filled with spite, and they plotted to capture and kill Him. So they seized Christ and brought Him before the High Priests and the elders. And the High Priests and elders said to Christ, "How is it that you declare yourself to be the son of God? Are you then the son of God?" But Christ said to them, "It is you who say so."

'Then they said to Christ, "Solomon built this temple over a space of forty years and you say: I will overthrow it and rebuild it in three days!" Christ replied, "I can overthrow it and build it again on the third day." Then the Jews were wrathful and they incited and inflamed the people of the Jews and said, "This man is fit to be killed." So they fell upon Christ and began to beat and mock Him; and some hit Him on the head with their fists, some beat Him on His sacred head with reeds, some struck Him on the cheek and others spat upon His

radiant face. They erected a cross and crucified Christ, and made him drink vinegar mingled with gall upon the cross.

'Then He turned His gaze towards His Father above and said, "My Father, I have fulfilled all things, and Israel would not hear me, but they have inflicted so great a torment as this upon me." And He bent His head and gave up the ghost. Quickly they took Him down from the cross. But there was a man who was a ruler and had been a disciple of Christ; he took up Christ's body and laid it in a new sepulchre, and rolled a great rock up against the door of the tomb. At early dawn on the morning of the third day, an angel came down from heaven and rolled away the rock from His tomb. Christ arose and came out from the sepulchre, and revealed Himself to two of His disciples and to Mary and Mary Magdalene and others of the women. Christ said to them, "Say to my disciples: Depart and go to Tabor in Galilee, and there you shall see me." And the twelve disciples went with great gladness to Mount Tabor and saw Christ and worshipped Him and kissed His sacred feet. But Christ said to His disciples, "Now you are no longer to be called disciples, but you are to receive the title of apostles. Now I shall ascend to my Father and your Father, my God and your God." Into His apostles, He breathed the living spirit and said to them, "Accept within yourselves the spirit of life, and go out among the towns and villages and country places from end to end of the world and perform miracles and marvels and feats of healing, and convert the heathen and baptize them in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and teach them all that I have told you. Behold, I am with you all the days of your life and until the end of the world. Freely you have received, and freely give to them also."

'Then Christ ascended into heaven among the angels,

but the twelve apostles departed and went about the villages and towns and country places, and spread abroad and preached the gospel of Christ, who had risen from the dead. They carried out miracles and marvels and feats of healing, and the people were converted and baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

'In this way Christianity increased and spread abroad, and it extended from end to end of the world. They appointed bishops and priests and built churches in which the cross was raised. Every land believed in Christ, and every country was filled with the Christian faith; and Christ was preached in all lands. As for the Jews, there befell them the fate which the prophets had foretold to them—some through the sword, others by famine, some were massacred and exterminated, and others vanished in captivity, for they did not observe the law of the Living God. But now the Christians bear the name of Israel, since *Israel* means, the people of God and the servant of Christ, whose glory exists for ever and ever, Amen.

'When I had listened and learnt everything from Archdeacon Samuel—all things from the beginning until now—and examined every feature of the creeds of the Jews and of the Christians, I believed in God Eternal and His Son Jesus Christ. Therein I have been baptized and nobody shall tear me away from Christ until my soul departs to heaven above. But about the faith of my fathers I am afraid and ashamed even to speak. For it was God who created heaven and earth, sun and moon and stars, the sea and the land, the rivers and assemblies of the waters, mountains and hills, meadows and forests, wood and fire, four-footed animals and beasts, reptiles and birds of the sky; and afterwards, God created mankind and made him lord over all these and subjected all

these to man. Are we now to abandon the God who created all this, and consider as gods things which have been created by God? Let this never be! The sun and moon and stars are not God; it was God who commanded the sun to lighten the day and ordered the moon and the stars to brighten the night, but they are not God. After all, God gives His commands to the clouds and they spread out and cover up the brilliance of the sun and moon. Therefore the sun and moon are not gods. Again, fire is no god, because man lights fire and man also puts it out, for man is lord of fire; therefore fire is not God. If it breaks out somewhere and spreads, it consumes whatever it encounters, either wood, meadow or homestead; if a man is at hand, it burns him up too. But if water comes into contact with it, then it extinguishes the power of even such a flame as this, and the fire is reduced to nothing, because it is no god. Are we then to honour it as a divinity?

'Rather it was God who gave us fire for our use, to melt ice and prepare all our food. When we require it, we light it, and when we so desire, we put it out. So that fire is not a god.

'We men created by God would by such a belief become like the dumb animals; just as in the reproduction of beasts, they do not know their parents, nor the offspring which has been born from them, so that their kind is reproduced promiscuously—similarly we men endowed with speech would resemble those dumb animals, not knowing our own parent or offspring, and propagating our kind promiscuously. But now that by God's grace baptism and the Christian faith have been instituted, men are endowed with knowledge, and since then these unrighteous ways have ceased and died out.

'Now I beg this one boon, O Lord Jesus Christ, that my body may be buried in Mtskheta where I received

baptism at the hands of the Catholicos Samuel and became worthy to partake in the faith of the Christians. From now on, nobody shall part me from Thy love and faith and will, as it is written—"Neither torments nor beatings nor hunger in prison, nor the sword, nor the death of my flesh shall have power to separate me from Thee, O Lord Jesus Christ".'

Then Buzmir the Marzapan said to him, 'Eustace my son, listen to me and do not diminish the days of your life for the sake of Christianity; leave not your wife a widow, nor your children as orphans. For the sake of your friends, do not let your life be cut short.'

St. Eustace said to him, 'Before you, other rulers have tormented me greatly and beaten me, and I did not submit to them. Am I now to be won over by you? Let this never come about!'

When Buzmir the Marzapan realized how firm and immovable were the heart and mind of the blessed Eustace, and after all his menaces and tortures and promises of good things had failed to induce him to adopt the faith of his fathers, he commanded his servants, 'Take him to prison and cut his head off secretly in the night, so that none of the Christians shall know and hallow his body. Then carry his corpse outside the city and cast it away to be eaten up by the beasts and the birds.'

Then the servants took the blessed Eustace to prison in order to carry out the Marzapan's orders.

St. Eustace said to them, 'Wait a little while for me, my brothers—for I am in your hands!—so that I may pray to my God.' So they forbore a little and waited and said, 'We will do this.' Then he bent his knee and raised his gaze towards heaven and said, 'O Lord God Almighty, Thou who wishest that all men who faithfully place their hope in Thy holy name may live, Thou who

didst hear the prayers of those first martyrs, some of whom were killed by the edge of the sword, others frozen to death in lake waters, some perishing by being cast into the sea, others by fire and being eaten up by wild beasts for Thy name's sake, and who then received the reward which Thou didst promise, which the eye has not seen, the ear has not heard of, and the heart of man has not experienced and which Thou hast prepared for Thy holy martyrs—let me too, O Lord, be made worthy to share with them their inheritance, their joy, their infinite happiness, as a latter-day remnant of the martyrs, according to the Apostle Paul's words: I am the last remnant of the apostles. Thou knowest, O my Lord Jesus Christ, that I have preferred no one before Thee, neither father, nor mother, nor brothers, nor children, but have loved Thee, the Lord, alone. Behold, my head is to be cut off today for Thy sake. This I pray and beseech and request from Thy bounty, that my body may not be abandoned here in Tiflis, but be buried in Mtskheta the holy, where Thou didst reveal Thyself to me, and that my relics may be invested with healing grace like those of the proto-martyrs.'

And a voice was heard speaking to Eustace and saying, 'In healing grace you shall be no less powerful than those first martyrs who bore witness for my sake. Have no care for your body, and it shall come to pass just as you have said.'

Then the blessed Eustace was very joyful and gave thanks to God. (But St. Eustace had previously left instructions with the blessed Stephen: When you hear of my death, carry my body immediately to Mtskheta and bury it there, where I was baptized.)

When he had finished praying and beseeching and offering up his requests to the Lord he said to the Marzapan's servants, 'Now carry out the official sentence upon

my person.' But they did not want to kill him. However, one of them said, 'We shall be put to death if he stays alive.' Then they laid hands upon him and struck his sacred neck with a sword and cut off his head; and he committed his soul to Christ the King.

In the night time they removed his corpse outside and cast it forth there. However, certain of the Christians heard of this and carried the body to Mtskheta, since Stephen had given instructions to those local Christians. When they arrived in Mtskheta they told Stephen and Stephen informed the Catholicos Samuel. He was very joyful, and buried the body with great glory and honour in the holy church at Mtskheta; and right up to the present time diseases are cured by it through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom belong majesty and power, honour and might and glory undiminished, together with the Holy Ghost, now and always and for all eternity, Amen.

CHAPTER 7

THE MARTYRDOM OF ABO, THE PERFUMER FROM BAGHDAD

DURING the two centuries which separate the lives of St. Eustace and St. Abo, the whole political structure of the Near East had been altered by a series of military and political upheavals. After capturing Jerusalem in 614, the Persians had undergone complete and humiliating defeat at the hands of the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius. The two great powers were by the middle of the 7th century so weakened by their death-struggle that Persia fell an easy prey to the new force of Islam, while the Arabs came at one point near to storming Constantinople itself. Tiflis, which had been for a short time under Byzantine control, was surrendered to the Arabs about the year 655, and remained until early in the 12th century under Muslim sway.

The Passion of St. Abo of Tiflis, who was put to death by the Arab governor of Georgia on January 6th, 786, is described by a Georgian observer, John son of Saban. His account has the merit of being written soon after Abo's death. In a prologue, which has been omitted in this translation, John describes the pitiful condition to which the Georgian nation had been reduced by Arab rule. The Caliphs had spared no effort to turn the Georgians into Muhammadans; force, cunning and economic coercion, complains John, had all been brought into play, with the result that some of the folk were 'shivering like reeds in a high wind.' It was partly to encourage his countrymen

to stand firm that John relates the heroic death of St. Abo, himself an Arab by birth, but converted to Christianity while living in Georgia.

Abo's Passion is of value not only for the religious history of Georgia, but also for the remarkable account it contains of a journey to the Khaqan or Emperor of the Khazars, a people of Turkish origin who adopted the Jewish faith. From their headquarters on the Volga they played a vital role in eastern politics and trade. Their rather unattractive habits and appearance became a by-word among the Greeks, who used the expression, 'You Khazar-face!' as a term of abuse.

The German version of the Passion of St. Abo edited by K. Schultze in Harnack's *Texte und Untersuchungen* (1905) gives a full list of references for the numerous biblical quotations encountered throughout the text.

JANUARY 7TH. Passion of the Holy and Blessed Martyr of Christ Abo, who was martyred in Georgia, in the town of Tiflis, by the hands of the Saracens; related by John, son of Saban, at the command of Samuel, by the grace of God Catholicos of Georgia.

Abo's arrival in Georgia, and his baptism

A.D. 772. Now this happened at the time when the ruling prince of Georgia, Nerses, son of the Kuro-palates¹ and ruling prince Adarnerse, had been summoned to the land of Babylon by its ruler, the Saracen Caliph Abdulla, the Commander of the Faithful, who ruled in the great city of Baghdad which he himself had built. At the instigation of evil men, he cast Duke Nerses of Georgia into a dungeon, where he was kept for three years until by God's command the Caliph Abdulla died and was succeeded by his son Mahdi (A.D. 775-85). Then

¹A high Byzantine court title, regularly bestowed on the ruling princes of Georgia, Armenia and other frontier states adjoining Byzantium.

God in His beneficence prevailed on Mahdi the Commander of the Faithful to release Nerses. So he let him out of his foul dungeon and sent him home again to be Duke of his own country once more.

And now, O lovers of Christ, I should like to tell you about the blessed saint and martyr Abo, what sort of person he was, and how he came here to Georgia. He was born of the line of Abraham, of the sons of Ishmael and the race of the Saracens. He had no foreign blood in him, nor was he born of a slave-woman, but of pure Arab stock on both his father's and his mother's side of the family. His father and mother and brothers and sisters resided there in Baghdad, the city of Babylon. And he was a lad about eighteen, or at least seventeen years old.

Wishing to come here to Georgia with Duke Nerses, he entered into his service, because he was good at preparing fragrant scents and lotions, as well as being versed in the literature of the Saracens, the children of Ishmael, whom Hagar bore to Abraham.

It was not of his own free will that Abo decided to come to our country. Just as the Lord spoke to the blessed Abraham in that land of Chaldæa, saying, 'Depart from your country and your kindred and your father's house, and enter into a land which I will show you'—in the same way this descendant of Abraham was not actuated by his own resolution but by a divine summons. So he left his father and mother, his brothers, sisters and relatives, his possessions and lands, as it is laid down in the Holy Gospel, and travelled here with Nerses for the love of Christ. When he arrived in Georgia he lived with Duke Nerses; *his good qualities made him generally popular*, and he learnt to read and write and converse freely in Georgian.

Then he started to acquire and read the holy books of

the Old and the New Testaments, for the Lord guided his understanding. He used to go to church and listen regularly to the Holy Gospel and readings from the Prophets and Apostles, and ask questions and gain information from many expert theologians. Some of them, by seeming to oppose him, were really giving him the chance to gain knowledge. In this way he became perfectly familiar with all the doctrine which has been given by Christ to the Holy Catholic Church. And so he became estranged from the faith of Muhammad and abandoned the rites and beliefs of his native land. He began to love Christ with all his heart, being inspired by the words, 'They related to me the creed of the heathen; but it was not like unto Thy law.' As he could not profess Christianity openly, he fasted and prayed to Christ in secret, and looked for a hidden place where he might receive the baptism of Christ, for he was afraid of the Saracens who occupy and rule our land.

A.D. 779-80. Now at this time the Saracen authorities again became enraged against Duke Nerses, and he took to flight. Though hard-pressed by the Saracen army the Lord saved him from their hands, and he passed through the gateway of the Ossetes, which they call Dari-Alan (the Alans' Gate, or Darial Pass over the Caucasus). Among the three hundred men of his escort was Abo, the blessed servant of Christ.

Nerses came as a refugee from his own country into the land of the north, where is the home and abode of the sons of Magog who are called the Khazars—wild men, fearsome of face, savage in character, drinkers of blood, without religion, except that they recognize a god the creator. When Duke Nerses arrived in the presence of the King of the Khazars the latter welcomed him graciously, as a stranger and a refugee from his enemies, and gave him and his followers food and drink.

When the blessed Abo saw that he had left the dread of Saracen tyranny far behind he hastened to draw near to Christ, and was baptized by the hands of venerable priests, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. For there are many towns and villages in that northern land which by the grace of the Holy Ghost abide securely in the Christian faith. The blessed Abo was henceforth evermore filled by Christ's grace, and able to devote himself without hindrance to fasting and prayer.

After some time had elapsed Nerses asked the King of the North to let him leave for the land of Abkhazia; he had earlier sent his mother, wife, children and treasure and all his household there since that country was secure from the Saracen threat.

Then God put the King of the North into a kindly mood, and he let Nerses go after presenting him with many gifts. So they set out, joyful in God's grace, and crossed the land of the heathen folk who are entirely ignorant of God, travelling in safety day and night for three months.¹ The blessed Abo spent all the journey in prayer and fasting and uninterruptedly singing psalms. When they reached the land of Abkhazia, the prince of that country welcomed Nerses and all his retinue. When Nerses set eyes on the queen his mother, and his wife and children, everyone gave joyful praise to God for keeping them safe and sound.

After the prince of Abkhazia had heard about the blessed Abo and how he had recently been baptized, he and all his people were very glad. The prince and the bishops and priests invited him and gave him their blessing, fortified him with encouraging words and cheered him with the promise of eternal life in Christ

¹Some manuscripts read 'three days,' which is absurd when we consider the distance between the Volga and the Black Sea province of Abkhazia.

Jesus. Abo for his part thanked them, answering with words of true faith, so that they were amazed and glorified God. More and more thanks did the blessed Abo render to God when he saw how their country was filled with Christ's faith, and no pagans were to be found living inside its borders. The frontiers of their land are formed by the Pontic (Black) Sea, which is a special domain of the Christian faith right up to the Khaldian borders. Trebizond is situated there, and so is Apsarea and the port of Nicopsia. And these towns and places are under the sway of the servant of God, the emperor of the Ionians, whose residence is in the great city of Constantinople.

When the blessed Abo saw the exceptional devoutness of the local people and their assiduity in prayer, he was filled with a fever of emulation, remembering the words of the holy apostle, 'It is always good to imitate excellence.' In that wintry season, on the 17th of January, the commemoration of our holy father Antony, he began to emulate Antony's severe exertions. Though living an urban life he struggled against man's enemy the devil as if he were out in the wilderness. By vigil and fasting he subdued his youthful flesh, so that he was able to quench all the fiery darts of the evil one. He remembered how our Redeemer went out into the desert after His baptism and by praying and fasting forty days defeated the wiles of His tempter the devil. In the same way the blessed Abo uttered no word in human society, but directed his gaze up to God in pious prayer; and thus he passed three months plunged in fasting and silent meditation. During those holy days of Lent, for seven weeks he used to partake of the sacred mystery of the Body and Blood of Christ on Sundays and Saturdays. On these occasions only he used to take a little food. At last he reached the great and holy festival day of the Resurrection of Christ

our Lord ; after this, he relaxed his austere fasting and loosed his tongue from its silence and glorified God.

Meanwhile after the flight of Nerses from Georgia, the Caliph Muhammad sent Stephen, son of Gurgun, and nephew of Nerses, to be prince of that country in place of his uncle, according to God's command. Then Nerses was glad because God had not deposed his family from its royal dignity. As he was extremely homesick, he sent envoys to ask the Caliph's representatives in Georgia to grant him a safe-conduct, and set off homewards with all his followers.

Just as they were leaving the land of Abkhazia, the prince of Abkhazia summoned the blessed Abo and said to him, 'Do not leave this country because the Saracens control the land of Georgia, and you are of Saracen birth. They will not tolerate you among them as a Christian. I am afraid for your sake, lest they deflect you willy-nilly from the Christian faith, and so bring to nothing your great feats of piety.'

But the blessed Abo replied, 'Now that Christ has shown His mercy towards me and released me from the darkness of my original ignorance and made me worthy of being baptized in Him, nothing can make me deny His name. Even if they offer me vast sums of gold and silver or interrogate me with tortures and flogging, they cannot take away from me the love of my Saviour ! So do not detain me, O faithful servant of God ! For what merit is there in my staying here, where no danger exists, nor any chance of dying for Christ ? I pray you now to let me go to reveal my Christian faith to those that hate Christ, just as I have heard that it was declared by Christ in the Holy Gospel, "No one lights a candle and puts it under a bushel, but they set it on a candlestick, so that it may give light to all. Thus let your light shine before men." So why should I hide this radiant

truth with which Christ has illumined me? Nothing will make me hide from the risk of death, for I have learnt from the holy apostle that "the faint-hearted cannot inherit the kingdom of God." Therefore I am not afraid of death, since I look for the kingdom of Christ.'

A.D. 782. In this way he won over the prince who let him go. Then he went with Nerses to the land of Georgia and entered the city of Tiflis, where he walked about openly professing the Christian faith. Of the local Saracens who had known him before some swore at him, others tried to intimidate him, others pestered him, while some tried to win him over by soft words. But he remained firmly attached to Christ, and was quite unmoved by them. For three years he went about openly in the city and the villages nearby as a professing Christian, and nobody molested him, for his time had not yet come. But God-fearing people who knew of his piety provided him with food and clothes.

The martyrdom of St. Abo

You who love Christ Jesus and the holy martyrs, listen to my account of this Christian hero, whose glorious courage won him the martyr's crown!

A.D. 786. In the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ, in that year after His Passion and Resurrection when Constantine, son of Leo, was reigning over the Christians in the great city of Constantinople, when Mousa, son of Mahdi, Commander of the Faithful, was reigning among the Saracens, in the pontificate of Samuel, Catholicos of Georgia, when Stephen, son of Gurgen, was Duke of Georgia, in the year 6424 from the Creation,¹ on Friday, January 6th, we commemorate the day of witness of the

¹Thus in some of the manuscripts; however, the list of names of contemporary sovereigns shows this date, corresponding to A.D. 915 is wrong, and that the year must in reality have been A.D. 786.

blessed saint and pious hero Abo in the city of Tiflis. Now this is how it occurred :—

A.D. 785. A little time before those days, the blessed martyr of Christ had been arrested and brought before the magistrate who was Amir (Saracen governor) over the city of Tiflis, who cast him into prison because of his Christian beliefs. Soon afterwards, however, Duke Stephen of Georgia intervened on his behalf and brought him out of prison and let him go.

A few days later, the people who had denounced the holy martyr were again moved to anger and fury, and filled with spite against the Christians. They concerted an intrigue against the saint and appeared before the new magistrate, who had replaced the previous Amir and judge in the city of Tiflis, and said to him, 'In this town there is a youth who was a Saracen by birth and brought up to live in that faith which Muhammad the Prophet gave us; and now he has abandoned this faith of ours and declares himself a Christian and walks fearlessly about the city teaching many of our people how to become Christians. Now you order his arrest and have him tortured and beaten until he confesses the faith of our prophet Muhammad. If he refuses, then kill him, so that his words may not win him a lot of imitators.'

When certain Christians heard what these people were urging they quickly went and told the blessed Abo. 'Look you,' they said, 'they are now hunting for you to arrest, torture and beat you.' And they besought him to run away and hide. But he replied, 'I am ready to face not only torture but even death for Christ's sake.' So he went out cheerfully and walked openly about the city precincts.

Then the magistrate's ushers came and arrested the blessed Abo and dragged him before the judge. And the magistrate said to him, 'What is this I hear about you,

that you are a Saracen by birth and descent, and have abandoned your native religion and fallen into error among the Christians? Now get ready to pray according to the faith in which your parents brought you up.'

The blessed Abo, however, fortified in devotion to Christ and filled with spiritual faith, said to the Amir his judge, 'You are quite right in saying that I am a Saracen by blood, born into that race on both father's and mother's side. I was educated in the religion of Muhammad, and lived according to it as long as I remained in ignorance. But when the Almighty had mercy on me and selected me from among my brothers and relatives and saved me through His Son Jesus Christ my God, and granted me a more perfect understanding, then I quitted my former faith, as being a man-made creed based on fables thought up by human subtlety and invention. So now I cling to the true faith of the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, as revealed to us by Jesus Christ. In that faith I have been baptized and now worship, for this is the True God, and now I am a Christian unwavering in my conviction.'

The judge said to him, 'Give up these insane ideas! If it was through any material want that you were attracted to the Christians, I will now treat you with greater gifts and favour.'

The blessed Abo said to him, 'Let your gold and silver remain with you for your own corruption. I do not seek human favours for I possess Christ's bounty, the crown of life incorruptible and grace eternal in heaven.'

Then the judge ordered Abo's hands and feet to be bound with iron chains, and in this condition he was shut up in prison. But the saint was happy and gave thanks to the Lord, saying, 'I thank Thee, O Lord, my God and Redeemer Jesus Christ, for making me worthy of enduring trial and imprisonment for Thy holy name.' It was

then Tuesday, December 27th, the commemoration of St. Stephen the disciple of Christ, first deacon and proto-martyr, and prince of all the martyrs; thus it fittingly befell that the prince of all martyrs, together with all the martyred host, should intercede for him, that this latest witness for Christ might not be prevented from being numbered among their glorious company!

So the blessed Abo stayed in his dungeon fasting and praying and singing psalms incessantly day and night. He performed deeds of charity, selling all his property to minister to the wants of his needy and famished fellow-prisoners. But the teachers of falsehood and the informers came to him and uttered words of cunning flattery: 'Son, do not sacrifice yourself, do not bargain away your young life in exchange for Christianity or alienate yourself from your brothers and relatives, lest you bring evil on your own head, and make us all sad.' Some of them threatened him and said, 'What use will this Christ of yours be to you? Who is going to save you from our hands? For they are already getting fire and instruments of torture ready to be used on you if you do not turn to us.'

Abo paid no attention to them, but went on praying and singing psalms silently in his mind. After they had gone on talking a long time he said, 'It is no use haranguing me, for I am like a deaf man and have heard nothing, and like a dumb man who never opens his mouth; I have become like a man deprived of hearing, with whom it is quite useless to converse, for my hope is in the Lord. Leave me alone, you worthless people, so that I can seek out the commandments of my God.' Since they could not shake this righteous man they went crestfallen away.

The blessed Abo remained in prison nine days, and spent all the daytime fasting and the nights in vigil until

dawn. But on the ninth day he said to all the Christians and others who were with him in jail, 'Tomorrow is the day of my passing away, to be united with my Lord God Jesus Christ.' For this fact was revealed by the Lord to His martyr.

After this he stripped off his clothes and gave them to be sold, so that they could buy candles and incense to burn for him; and these he distributed for burning in all the city churches. He also sent to ask all the priests to pray for him, so that he might not be deflected from the Christian faith, but be made worthy of the calling of the Christian martyrs.

He passed the night before his solemn commemoration day in vigil, and lifted up two great candles in his hands and stood up in the middle of his prison. There he remained standing upright till dawn without respite, until he had finished reciting the Psalms and the candles had burnt away in his hands, which were fastened to his neck with iron chains. And as he stood steadfastly he spoke aloud, saying, 'I will lift up my eyes unto the Lord, He is ever before me, for He is my right hand, that I may not falter,' and the words that follow.

When the tenth day dawned it was the 6th of January, the commemoration of our Lord's baptism; and it was a Friday. And the blessed Abo said, 'This is a great day for me, for I see the twofold victory of my Lord Jesus Christ, since it was on this day that He went down unclothed into the river Jordan to be baptized; and the heads of the monster hidden in those deep waters He annihilated by divine power. Now it is my turn today to vanquish the fears which beset my soul's fleshly covering, and go down into the city as into the sacred waters to be baptized in my own blood by fire and spirit, as John the Baptist preached. Then indeed I shall enter again into the waters to receive baptism, for it is today that the

Holy Spirit goes out over all the waters, by which all Christ's faithful followers are baptized as in the river Jordan. When I am divested of my body, I shall revile and trample on the wily machinations which Satan has devised for me in this city.

'And again, it was on a Friday that my Lord Jesus Christ in His Passion, with His hands nailed to the Cross exposed the enemy of all mankind and put him to shame to all the ends of the earth. Now grant me too that I may take up the struggle against that foe of the Christians, and by shedding my blood for Christ may turn him into an object of contempt and derision for all Christians because he imagined that he could estrange me by fear of death from the love of my Lord Jesus Christ. But I shall pour scorn on his plans and overcome him by Christ's grace and thus repay my twofold debt to my Saviour.'

Then he asked for water and washed his face and anointed his head and said, 'Once upon a time I myself was a skilled perfumer and mixer of fragrant oils. But today this is my anointing for the grave. From now on I shall no longer be anointed with this perishable oil of my petty nature, but as Solomon the Wise taught me in his *Song of Songs*, "I ran in the savour of Thy good ointments," O Christ, who filled me with the imperishable perfume of Thy faith and love. Thou knowest, O Lord, that I have loved Thee more than I have loved myself!'

When he had spoken these words he went into the holy church and they let him partake of the Holy Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood. It was the third hour of his solemn festival day, and when he had partaken of the true and lifegiving mystery, he said, 'I thank Thee, my Lord God Jesus Christ, who hast given me as provision for my journey this life-imparting flesh of Thine, as well as Thy sacred blood to be my cheer and strength!'

Now I know that Thou hast not abandoned me, but art standing by me, and I by Thee. From now on I shall take no more of that other food from which one grows hungry again, nor of that other drink from which one thirsts again, but this is sufficient for me until the life eternal. Now, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou, O Lord, art with me.'

As soon as he had said these words the judge's minions arrived, and he took leave of all the imprisoned Christians and said, 'Remember me in your prayers, for you will see me no more in this transitory world.' And they attached chains to his feet and hands and brought him out through the town. The Christians and friends of his who saw him shed tears for his sake; but St. Abo said to them, 'Do not weep over me, but be glad, for I am going to my Lord. Send me on my way with prayers, and may the peace of the Lord protect you!' But he went along like someone who is making a corpse to walk, for it was thus that he looked upon his body; and as he went along he repeated in his mind the 118th Psalm¹: 'Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.' After he had chanted this passage he repeated the words of that blessed robber, 'Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom.'

In this way he arrived before the judgment seat of the Amir his judge; when he had come there, he boldly made the sign of the Cross over the gate, and crossed himself. Then they brought him before the magistrate, who said to him, 'What is this, young man, what ideas have you got into your head?' But the holy martyr became filled with the Holy Ghost and said, 'I have taken thought, and am a Christian.'

The judge said to him, 'Have not you abandoned your

¹In the English Psalter, Psalm 119.

idiocy and folly?" The blessed Abo said to him, 'Although I was once sunk in ignorance and foolishness, nevertheless I later became worthy of Christ.'

The judge said to him, 'Do you not realize that with these words of yours, you have pronounced your own death sentence?' St. Abo replied, 'If I die, I am convinced that I shall live with Christ. Why do you delay? Carry out your design upon me! For I am as firm as that wall against which you are leaning; I do not listen to your futile words, for my mind is with Christ in heaven.'

The judge said to him, 'What is this delight granted to you from Christ, for the sake of which you do not even shrink from death?' St. Abo said to him, 'If you desire to know this delight, then believe in Christ yourself and be baptized in Him, and thereby you will become worthy to experience the delight he bestows.'

Then the Amir became angry and ordered him to be taken out and beheaded. The attendants led him out from the bar of judgment into the palace courtyard and removed from him the irons which shackled his hands and feet. But the saint himself quickly tore off the robe in which he was clad; when he was naked he made the sign of the Cross over his face and body, saying, 'I thank and bless Thee, O Holy Trinity, that Thou hast made me worthy to take part in the feats of Thy holy martyrs!' After saying this, he folded his arms cross-wise behind his back, and with a glad face and steadfast spirit invoked Christ and bowed down his neck to the sword.

Three times they struck him with the sword, for they thought that by fear of death, they might separate him from Christ; but the holy martyr looked on the sword in brave silence until he offered up his soul to the Lord.

When the foes of Christ who had denounced the saintly martyr saw that the blessed one's life was accom-

plished in Christ, that he had fought the good fight and had overcome their demented frenzy by his faith and constancy, they were even more filled with spite, and appeared in front of the tyrant and said, 'We know that the Christians have a custom that if someone is executed for this Christ of theirs, they steal his body and give it honourable burial. And with fraudulent intent they publicly declare it to have miraculous healing powers and distribute the garments and the hair from its head as well as its bones as a talisman against sickness, and in this way they deceive a lot of ignorant people. Now order his body to be handed over for us to take out and burn with fire and scatter to the wind and confound the fraud of the Christians, so that they may all see and be afraid, and some of them be converted to our faith. Our people also would be deterred by this from turning to the doctrine of the Christians.' (Although they said this from spite towards the Christians they testified to the strict truth, since Christ's martyrs are a source of healing grace to all who draw near to them in Christ-given love and faith.)

The judge answered, 'Take it wherever you like, and do with it whatever you think best.' Then they went and raised his sacred body from the ground and laid it in a portable box together with his clothes; from the earth they scooped up the blood that had been shed by this righteous one, leaving absolutely nothing upon the ground, and they poured it into a receptacle. They loaded the saint on to a cart, just like those forty steadfast saints—for the place where they cut off the head of the holy martyr was by the portals of the holy church dedicated to the Forty Saints,¹ so that it was fitting that he should be treated in the same way as those forty valiant holy martyrs had been.

¹These are the Forty Martyrs of Sebastia, to whom there is more than one reference in the Life of Peter the Iberian, above.

After they had transported the saint's sacred body outside the town and taken it up to the spot which is called the Place of Lamentation—for it is there that the burial ground of the people of this town is situated—they took him off the cart and laid him on the ground. They collected firewood and straw and oil, and heaped it on to the holy body and set fire to it, until they had burnt the flesh of the holy martyr on that spot which is to the east of the city fortress which they call *Sadilego* ('the Dungeon'), at the edge of a cliff on the steep bank of the great river which flows eastwards from the city and is called the Kura.

They did not let any of the Christians come near that place until they had finished burning the holy martyr's corpse. But the relics of the holy martyr, which they were unable to destroy by fire, they stuffed into a sheep-skin which they sewed up firmly and carried and threw into the great river, below the city bridge on which the venerable Cross of the Bridge was set up. And the river water became a winding sheet for those sacred relics and the depths of the waters a sepulchre for the holy martyr, so that no one should wantonly disturb them. Thus it was that Christ's foes acted, and thus that the blessed one completed his noble deeds of piety.

Then a multitude of Christians from the town assembled and set aside all dread of the tyrants and came out in a body to the place where they had burnt the corpse of the holy martyr. Old folk hurried along with their sticks, the lame hopped along like deer, youths came running, children raced each other, while the women were like those saintly bringers of perfume who ran to bring sweet ointments to the tomb of Christ our Lord—truly now they imitated them, for they ran with tears and brought with them candles and incense in their hands. All of them came joyfully, offering up thanks to

Christ, and scooped up the earth at that spot and brought many who were afflicted by various diseases, and they were cured that same day.

But God Omnipotent showed His might still more greatly, and gave glory to His martyr and revealed a wondrous miracle so that all should know that this was a martyr of Christ. When that day was growing dim and it was the first hour of the night, the Lord set over that spot a flaming star like a fiery torch, which stood for a long time over the place where they had burnt the blessed martyr of Christ. It stood high up in the sky until the third hour of the night or longer, and gave forth a brilliance that was like no earthly fire, but like a fearsome lightning flash, seen by all the townspeople, including the judge and all the local Christians and all the Saracens and travellers who had come from other lands. For a long time they gazed with the pupils of their eyes until the tyrants were put to shame; and some of the Saracen judge's attendants came out to look at that spot because they imagined the Christians might have lit the place up. When they drew near the spot they saw the star rising up higher in the air, and could not approach the place, for they were seized with the fear of God.

Again, on the second night a light still more wondrous issued from the river. The Saracens, amazed by this unusual spectacle of heavenly fire between earth and sky, tried to conceal the marvel; yet no waters could quench it, nor could the furiously seething waves and depths put it out. Where they had hurled in the divinely consecrated relics of the blessed martyr below the bridge, a light shone in the form of a pillar like a lightning flash, which continued bright for a long time. Both sides of the river were lit up, the craggy banks, and the bridges from top to bottom. This also was witnessed by the whole multitude of the townsfolk, so that all might be convinced

that this was indeed a martyr of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and that everyone, whether believers in Christ or unbelievers, might understand that true is the word of the Lord when He said, 'If anyone serve me, he will receive honour from my Father, which is in heaven.'

If now He showed such honour to Abo's perishable flesh, how much more shall we not see him honoured at the resurrection of the just, when he is crowned imperishably among the angels in glory and exaltation? What shame for their demented frenzy will fall upon those who denied Christ and smote and persecuted and destroyed those saints of His whom then He will be admitting into His heaven! But now, beloved, it behoves us all the more to cherish the memory of those first blessed martyrs, that through what we have witnessed of this new martyr we may believe also in those proto-martyrs, and utter the words of the blessed David: 'Honourable before the Lord is the death of His saints!' And to Him belongs glory, now and always and for all eternity, Amen.

CHAPTER 8

GREGORY OF KHANDZTA AND THE GEORGIAN NATIONAL REVIVAL

THE life of St. Gregory of Khandzta presents a number of links with that of St. Abo of Tiflis, the story of whose martyrdom we have related in the last chapter. Gregory, who was born in A.D. 759, was of almost exactly the same age as Abo; both of them were protégés of Duke Nerses of Georgia; both of them showed a predilection for the ascetic life. Their careers, however, were very different: St. Abo chose to offer up his life as a martyr to the Christian faith; Gregory, on the other hand, preferred to leave the Arab zone of influence altogether, and help in Georgia's national revival by mobilizing the spiritual forces of the nation against the Muslim overlords.

The district of Tao-Klarjeti in south-western Georgia where Gregory settled with his followers presented at that time a picture of desolation and ruin. In reprisal for popular resistance to Arab rule, the Caliphs had sent expeditions to ravage the country; a cholera epidemic broke out soon afterwards.

In spite of these adverse conditions the time was ripe for St. Gregory's ministry. South-western Georgia was the centre of patriotic resistance to Saracen rule. The movement was headed by the energetic Bagratid prince Ashot (780-826), who had quarrelled with his Arab suzerains and placed himself under the ægis of the Byzantine emperor, from whom he received the imperial title of Kuropalates. Ashot had chosen Artanuj, on a

tributary of the Chorokh, as his residence; he restored the ancient fort there and built a church dedicated to St. Peter and St. Paul. He was joined by thousands of refugees from the Arab zone of Georgia, who helped him to build up a new, national state. Ashot fostered the legend that his line, the Bagratids, traced their descent from King David of Israel.

The patriotic movement had much of the character of a crusade, and needed a militant religious leader. This role was ably filled by St. Gregory of Khandzta, who was as much a statesman as he was a dignitary of the Church. He became Archimandrite of twelve monasteries in Klarjeti, five of which were built or restored by him, and the others by his disciples. These formed a real monastic republic, with Gregory as their redoubtable and often despotic president. So strong did he become that he was able to interfere effectively in the private life of the ruling prince Ashot, and win for the monastic community a dominant position in public affairs.

Gregory lived to be a centenarian, dying on October 6th, 861. His biography was written some ninety years after his death, in A.D. 951, by Giorgi Merchuli, in consultation with the prior of Khandzta, Gregory's chief monastery. The work contains many realistic details of life in medieval Georgia; its many descriptions of geographical features moved its first editor, the late N. Y. Marr, to refer to it as a Georgian Baedeker. It is from Marr's original edition of 1911 that the following selected episodes are taken. Sub-titles have been added by the translator.

Introductory

The source of every good thing, namely Christ, the God of all creation, has implanted the root of wisdom in the character of true sages. Accordingly, you have the

right to expect well-pondered wisdom from sages, while fools may be expected to listen in silence to the words of the wise. But nowadays, fools are philosophizing on their own account, and have imposed silence on the wise. They do not realize that as Solomon remarked, 'Speech is silver, but silence is golden.' For when the wise are overtaken by silence, then 'their wisdom crieth in the streets,' because their tongue does not utter idle words or backbiting, in so far as they are occupied in seeking out things of value and meditating on all forms of holiness and uprightness in virtue, and offering up prayers continually.

But since I have not the strength to pray without ceasing, and am beneath the level of idiots, my defects do not permit me to be silent. So rather than speak of any other thing, I have preferred to relate as well as I can for the benefit of my listeners the worthy life of those God-imbued men, our blessed father Gregory and his friends and disciples, as truthfully narrated by the saint's pupils, and the pupils of his disciples.

Gregory's early years

Gregory was the son of distinguished, noble and pious parents, and was brought up in the royal household of the great Duke Nerses by the care of the virtuous queen his wife, who had adopted him, for he was her nephew. From the womb he was dedicated by his mother to God's service, like the prophet Samuel. Just like the Baptist, he grew up in fasting. From infancy, neither wine nor meat entered his lips, because he had set aside his soul as an abode for Christ; he put on the guise of monastic life, being free of youthful mischief and all human agitation. He dwelt by himself in his own quarters, so that people used to call him the Hermit.

His aptitude for learning was remarkable; he rapidly

mastered the Psalms of David, studied all patristic literature in Georgian, learnt to read and write in many tongues, and could recite devotional books by heart. In addition, he made a thorough study of the wisdom of the philosophers of this world. Whenever he found there some excellent idea he absorbed it, but the evil he rejected. His perfect attainments became universally renowned; but he eschewed the externals of worldly wisdom, according to the words of the Apostle, 'Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?' In appearance he was tall, slim of figure, of goodly stature, in every way perfect in body and innocent in spirit.

Ordained a priest

Then the rulers who had brought him up, as well as his estimable mother and the multitude of the people, wished to consecrate the blessed Gregory to the priesthood. Owing to his youth, the blessed one was overcome by misgivings. Then the wise princes said to him, 'The honour of age, as Solomon says, consists not in longevity but in the intelligence of a man; a life of virtue constitutes mature years. Christ has given you excellent maturity of mind, so do not now disobey Him, but listen to Christ's command and as a priest, serve that Eternal Priest who suffered for us and saved us all.'

So the blessed Gregory gave in to them and was ordained priest; and the multitude rejoiced as they received from his revered hands the Body and Blood of Christ.

Then the princes planned to make him a bishop, for he expounded the truth to all men like an angel of God, as it is written, 'The priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.'

Chooses the monastic life

When the blessed Gregory saw himself exalted in the flesh, his heart was very sorrowful, and he decided to flee secretly from his homeland in accordance with a divine summons which guided him like the patriarch Abraham. But while it was from a land of pagan tribes that God brought out Abraham, it was from a country of devout believers that He led Gregory away, in order that a light unquenchable might shine forth in the deserted wilderness.

To bring his virtuous design to fruition Gregory sought out good friends—his cousin Saba, who was called Saban, who restored and became bishop of Ishkhan; Theodore, builder and abbot of Nedzvi; and Christopher, builder and abbot of Kviriketi. Faith united these four into a partnership, and godly love strengthened their joint resolve.

Then they set forth joyfully on a road which they knew not; yet they were not plunged into bewilderment, because the Lord guided them on their way. And He led them first of all to Opiza. In Opiza there was a small group of brethren, who had collected there for the love of Christ, since a small church dedicated to St. John the Baptist was situated there. Their prior was called Abba George; he was the third prior of Opiza, Samuel and Andrew having passed away. Father Gregory and his companions spent two years at Opiza in arduous feats of monastic austerity, in accordance with the rules of the monks of that time.

Father Gregory, however, was yearning for a hermit's life because he had heard of the angelic life of the anchorites in the solitary wilderness. Father Gregory visited them all and gained instruction in their excellent feats, from some of them, in praying and fasting, from others in meekness and love, from others in kindness and

freedom from malice, from others in poverty and the habit of lying on the ground or sleeping in a sitting position, from others in vigil and the silent cultivation of handicrafts, and other similar acts of virtue.

The building of Khandzta

At that time there lived in Khandzta an ancient hermit, a virtuous and holy man called Khuedios. This saintly man had a vision, not in his sleep, but in broad daylight. On that sacred spot where now is built the holy church of Khandzta, he saw a cloud of light in the form of a church standing a long time, and from the cloud there issued a powerful scent. And the saintly man heard a voice, 'On this place a church will be built by the hands of Gregory the priest, the man of God, and the perfume of his prayers and those of his disciples will mount to God like a sweet incense.' When he saw this vision he was very glad. Being accustomed to visions from God he started to wait for the holy man who had been announced.

Then our blessed father Gregory, guided by the Holy Spirit, arrived at Khandzta where the saintly hermit lived. They were very happy to meet one another, and offered up a prayer. At dawn, the hermit took St. Gregory to look round all the neighbourhood of Khandzta, and he took a great fancy to it. He said to the hermit, 'I will go to Opiza and soon return with my brethren whom I have left there, so that they may come with me to receive spiritual benefit from your prayers.' Arriving at Opiza, he told the brothers the glad news; so they promptly went to Father George, prior of Opiza, received blessings from him and all the community, and cheerfully came to Khandzta.

Then St. Gregory began to build Khandzta; and they consecrated a place apart and set to work to level the

ground for cells, since the crags of Khandzta are the most precipitous of all the remote fastnesses of Klarjeti. They had great difficulty in preparing the site, as they had neither hatchets nor pickaxes nor any other tools. The monks of Opiza provided for all their bodily needs, since at that time there was no other fully constructed monastery in those parts besides Opiza. Nor were there any ordinary settlers with houses in that region; those parts of Klarjeti, Tao and Shavsheti had only lately been repopulated, so that there were only a few pioneers scattered in the woods round about.

The blessed father Gregory began by building a wooden church and then a hermitage for himself. The brethren had a little cell each, and a big room for a refectory. Every day their numbers increased: the Lord procured workers of the eleventh hour for the cultivation of that righteous vineyard.

In the meantime, the blessed hermit Khuedios had become very old and was nearing the hour of departure from the flesh. Our holy father Gregory and the brothers came to visit the hermit, and said to him, 'Bless us, Holy Father, since now you are departing towards the Lord God!' He replied, 'May the God of peace, love and charity be with you in all things. Pray for me, holy fathers, for today I am going away to a strange abode before the awful throne of God.' But they said, 'You are no stranger to the abode of the holy angels, with whom you constantly rejoice in spirit before Christ.' And so the blessed hermit found rest. Sweet was his sleep. And Father Gregory and the brethren bore away the body of him who had triumphed over the world, and buried it in a grave to the tune of sacred hymns; and they offered up thanks to Christ who grants victory to those who do His will.

Monastic austerities

In those early days of our blessed Father Gregory, the rules for his disciples were very severe. In their cells were small bedsteads with a bare minimum of bedding, and just a water-jug each. They had no other luxury in the way of eating or drinking apart from what they ate at the communal table—this was all they lived on. Many of them did not drink any wine at all, while those who did, partook of it in strict moderation. There were no chimneys in their cells because no fires were lit. Nor did they light candles at night. But the night-time was spent in singing psalms and the day in reading books and praying.

During Lent, Father Gregory fed on just a little dried cabbage. His extra diet in ordinary times was a modicum of bread once a day, and water to the same amount. He never touched wine from his childhood days. God alone knows the countless merits of him and his disciples.

Gregory and Ashot the Kuropalates

At that period those regions were governed by the great and pious Bagratid ruler, Ashot Kuropalates, who permanently established the reign of his dynasty over the Georgians. Now there was a certain renowned gentleman in the service of Ashot Kuropalates; his name was Gabriel Dapanchuli, and his descendants are called Dapanchuli to this day. This gentleman was adorned with every perfection, with wealth, ripeness of judgment and a noble presence; he was renowned for success in all matters of business, as well as for his piety.

The noble Gabriel informed King Ashot the Kuropalates about the merits of Father Gregory and his building of a monastery in the desolate wilderness. When he heard this, the honourable Prince Ashot immediately wrote a letter with his own hand, and sent to Father

Gregory a picked man from his retinue with one of Gabriel's servants. After he had read the prince's polite letter of invitation, Father Gregory quickly went to see the ruler.

The Kuropalates said to Father Gregory, 'To the kings of Israel God sent prophets from time to time to bring them glory and defend the law. In the same way God has made you eminent in our time, to bring glory to the Christians and constantly intercede for us before Christ.'

He replied, 'Monarch, you who are called the son of the divinely anointed prophet David, may Christ confirm you in the inheritance of David's kingdom and virtues. Therefore I make this pronouncement: "May the rule of your children and their seed never be removed from this land for all time, but may they stand firmer than immovable rocks and eternal mountains and be glorified for ever!"'

After this the man who had been sent as messenger gave an enthusiastic account of Khandzta, declaring, 'This solitary spot is excellent for the warmth of the sun and the mildness of the air all around. It has a free-flowing spring, beautifully cool and pleasant. There are countless groves of trees, and as much in the way of crops as one can expect to grow in the wilderness, but there are no fields for harvest or for hay. Nor is it possible for any to exist there on the sharp and craggy peaks of the Ghado mountains.'

When he heard this, the renowned Kuropalates granted them fine estates, including that of Shatberd as a farm and country resort for Khandzta. Each of the prince's three noble sons, Adarnerse, Bagrat and Guaram, also provided generously for the needs of the monastery.

During the saint's lifetime, the sovereign Ashot Kuropalates conquered many lands. He built the castle of

Artanuj as a residence for the queen his consort, and lived with her happily for many years. But the devil led the monarch astray. He introduced into the castle a concubine with whom he committed adultery, for the demon of love had greatly excited him.

When St. Gregory heard of this soul-destroying conduct he was greatly upset and began personally to rebuke the sovereign. The ruler promised to put a stop to his sinful ways, but was not strong enough to keep his word, as he was a slave to his passion.

The blessed Gregory bided his time. One fine day, when Ashot was in a far country, he set out from Shatberd to Artanuj; arriving towards evening in front of the castle, he sent a man to see the woman we have mentioned and ask for food. She was very glad, and gave various provisions for the holy man and his disciples. When morning came, he again sent the man to her, with a request for a personal meeting.

Even more glad, she promptly came out to see the saint, accompanied by two maids, in order to receive the holy man's blessing. But he did not give it to her and ordered her to sit down a little way off. The disciples withdrew at a glance from their mentor, as well as the maids, for everyone stood in awe of the saint. Then the blessed Gregory said to her, 'Wretched creature! Why have you come between husband and wife, ensuring perdition for yourself through this grievous sin of yours which enslaves you to the devil, and frivolously offering yourself as a temptation for the great sovereign?' She said tearfully, 'Holy man of God, I have no power over myself, because the prince is deeply in love with me, and now I do not know what to do. I am extremely distressed by what you have said.' The saint continued, 'My child, obey fully my words, which are those of a pious man, and I pledge myself before Christ that He will forgive

you all your sins.' She answered, 'Holy Father, I am in your hands. Intercede on behalf of my soul.'

Only then did he grant her his blessing; then he gave her a lace from his sandals to gird herself with and said to her, 'My child, today is the salvation of your soul; I will take you to the blessed abbess Mother Fevronia.' This cheered her very much. Then Gregory told the maids to go back home into the castle, and said to the woman, 'My child, we must be on our way. Go in front of us.' And so he brought her to the convent of Mere. The blessed abbess' consent had already been given beforehand, and he confided her to Fevronia's care with the words, 'Look after her, and take every precaution when the Kuropalates starts searching for her. You see how chastened is her spirit.' She said, 'Christ will take good care of His servant, whom He has found through you, worthy Father!'

Meanwhile the Kuropalates appeared at the castle and asked after the woman. As he could not find her, he was indignant, because he had an inkling of what had happened, and promptly went to Mere. After receiving Mother Fevronia's blessing, the prince engaged her in conversation: 'Do you know, Mother, why I have come here now?' 'The Lord knows,' she replied, 'why you have come.' 'I have come,' he said, 'because Father Gregory, so it seems, has brought here the woman who is stewardess of our house. All our property was in her custody, and we have discovered a serious deficit in our treasury. So kindly command her to attend at the castle; she can hand over everything according to the account-book, and then she may return to you or do as she likes.'

Fevronia retorted sharply, 'Beware of exciting my indignation against sinful people who commit wicked crimes.'

When he heard these words, the prince was confused

by the justice of her reproach and stood for a long while in shamed silence, as if struck dumb. At length the downcast Kuropalates said in a rueful voice, 'Happy is the man who is no longer alive.' Then he got up quickly to leave. The blessed Fevronia, who was kindhearted, tried to persuade him to stay for some refreshment, but he would not consent. The desire for carnal passion had quitted him, and he had become conscious of the shamefulness of his conduct. In spirit he rejoiced because wisdom had conquered pernicious weakness; in a pure heart he revered the blessed ones who had bestowed on his soul the crown of eternal salvation.

Gregory visits Constantinople

Father Gregory said to himself, 'Since the brethren in my monastery are superior in virtue to the monks of this age, a set of ecclesiastical rules ought to be instituted for my church, so that it may not be exposed to criticism from expert theologians.' For this purpose he made plans to go to the treasury of Christ, the second Jerusalem, which is Constantinople, to visit all the remarkable holy places of Greece and pray there.

Just then, he found that one of his friends was making a trip to Jerusalem, so he asked him to write down the monastic rules of St. Savva and send them to him.

Then he appointed deputies to look after the brethren and took leave of them, promising to return soon. He took with him his cousin Saba and another disciple of his and set off for Greece. Arriving at Constantinople, he made obeisance to the Wood of Life and all the other holy relics, and joyfully went round to pray at all the sacred shrines; for he knew many languages and was well versed in godly knowledge. Some of the things he saw served him as a model of excellence, while others provided a warning against evil. In this way his heart

was filled with the ineffable riches of the New Testament. Cheered by spiritual grace, they set off on their homeward way.

When they reached Tao they heard from the local folk that Ashot Kuropalates had been assassinated, and that his sons were reigning in his stead. Then they were overcome with grief at the fate of the god-fearing monarch, and tearfully offered up prayers for their dead king. After this they prayed for his sons, the noble princes, that the Lord might preserve them and prolong their days in glory and pious works.

And so they arrived at Khandzta, their own monastery, bringing with them relics of the saints, holy icons and many other sacred objects. They found all the brothers well and in good spirits, and were glad now that the grace of our Saviour had once more reunited His servants. After a few days Gregory sent Saba to Ishkhan and gave him two of his disciples. He himself directed the spiritual life of Khandzta in accordance with God's will.

Afterwards, the man who had been to Jerusalem returned, and handed over a document containing the monastic rules of St. Savva. The blessed Gregory then laid down regulations for his own church and monastery, as selected and compiled from those in force at all the holy places.

Relations between Church and State

By the will of God, and with the consent of his brothers and by command of the Greek Emperor, the Kuropalates Bagrat succeeded his father, the Kuropalates Ashot, for he was divinely appointed to exercise authority; and both his brothers, the noble prince Adarnerse, the elder, and Guaram, the younger, submitted to him in divine brotherly love. The realm of

these three princely brothers grew through Christ's virtue and grace, so that they conquered many lands by the sword and drove out the children of the Saracens.

At this time, Gregory's heart moved him to remember Saba of Ishkhan, and he informed the pious Kuropalates of all his earlier career. When Bagrat heard about this he was glad and quickly wrote a letter and sent worthy envoys to extend him an honourable invitation. But these envoys returned and reported to the Kuropalates, 'The man of God declines to come here.' Then the prince said to Gregory, 'It was stupid of me not to entrust the writing of that letter to you. Now please write to him in suitable terms.' The blessed Saba obeyed the prince's second summons, the more especially through respect for Father Gregory's letter. The prince came out to meet him and greeted him with respect, and Saba blessed him.

When they had sat down the prince said to Saba, 'Obedience is due to the sovereign. Why did not you come at my first summons, Holy Father?'

He replied, 'Noble King, you are lord of the earth, but Christ is Lord of the heavens, the earth, and the underworld; you are lord of this nation, but Christ is Lord of all men that are born; you are king of this transitory time, but Christ is King eternal. He remains perfect and unchangeable, timeless, without beginning or end, King of angels and of men, and His words are to be heeded more than yours. Christ declared: No man can serve two masters. But now I have come before you in obedience to the word of our brother and pastor Gregory.'

The prince answered, 'Your words are just, holy man. But it is better to illumine many souls by setting oneself up like a lighted candle on a candlestick. Christ said to His disciples: Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.'

After this the prince went to Ishkhan, accompanied by the blessed fathers Gregory and Saba ; and the prince liked that place very much. But why prolong our account ? By God's will Saba became bishop of Ishkhan, with authority over the see and the cathedral church originally built by the blessed Nerses, Catholicos of Armenia, which had been left in desolate widowhood for many years. Now it was built again by the blessed Saba with the material aid of those pious princes, and Ishkhan began to flourish perpetually and for all time.

Distinguished careers of Gregory's disciples

Let us recall Gregory's worthy pupils Arsen and Ephraim. It pleased God to make them both bishops, each having his own spiritual flock. Many years before Arsen, the great Ephraim became bishop of Adsqur and primate of Samtskhe. Later the great Arsen became Catholicos-Patriarch in the cathedral church of Mtskheta, where the Tunic of our Lord is preserved. Having been brought up together they were very fond of one another.

The great Ephraim became a great benefactor to our land. Earlier, the Catholicos-Patriarchs of the East used to bring the holy chrism for their consecration from Jerusalem. But Ephraim instituted anointment with holy chrism prepared in Georgia, by glad consent and authorization of the Patriarch of Jerusalem.—Georgia is reckoned to consist of those spacious lands in which church services are celebrated and all prayers said in the Georgian tongue. Only the *Kyrie-eleison*, which means 'Lord, have mercy,' or 'Lord be merciful to us,' is pronounced in Greek.

The blessed Ephraim was bishop for forty years ; he perceived the secret deeds of men as if they had been public, and by his word cured deadly diseases in a twink-

ling. By a word also he could smite the unrighteous with death—many such miracles he used to perform. He passed away at a great age, filled with divine grace.

In Father Gregory's time the worthy bishop Zacharias accomplished the following marvels :—

Near the monastery of Tbeti a fearsome crag was trembling on the edge of the cliff, and the monks fled from their dwellings in terror. Zacharias stayed confidently, and said to them : 'Tomorrow you will see that crag lying in a place quite harmless to us.' And so it turned out. The fathers did not notice its trembling any more, and next day it was lying motionless on a spot which they had not expected, just as the saint had said ; and they glorified Christ.

This same Zacharias was sitting one autumn day in Tbeti, under his own ripe grape-vines, at which a blackbird was persistently pecking. So he made the sign of the cross over it, and it immediately fell dead. Once more he made the sign of the cross, and the blackbird revived and flew off to its family.

An evil plot frustrated

Among this holy wheat there grew a noxious weed in the shape of a deacon who had been educated in Tiflis by the Amir Sahak, son of Ismail, and been sent as his representative to Ashot Kuropalates. When he saw that the bishop of Anchi was dead this evil man, whose name was Tskir, petitioned Ashot through the Amir Sahak for the episcopal see of Anchi. When as a result of God's forbearance Tskir had forcibly taken possession of Anchi, he heaped evil upon evil to an extent which cannot be set down in this book.

He was often reproached for his irregular conduct by the pioneer hermit fathers of Klarjeti and all the Orthodox bishops, and most of all by Father Gregory, archi-

mandrite of those famed retreats. But Tskir secretly summoned a certain layman of Anchi, a poor lewd fellow, but a powerful marksman, and promised to give him three bushels of millet and five goats, and sent him to Khandzta to kill Father Gregory. On the way, this man found out from someone that Gregory was at the country estate belonging to Khandzta and would be returning home that very day. So he went to lie in ambush in the wood of Khandzta, carrying his bow already strung.

Meanwhile our blessed Father Gregory was walking down by himself from the country estate towards Khandzta. Then the wretched villain saw a great apparition all around the saint : he was surmounted by a pillar of light shining brilliantly and extending up to heaven. On his head was a cross giving out radiance all round, like a rainbow in showery weather. Seeing this marvel, the man was seized with intense fear ; as if the sinews of his arms had been dissolved, he fell on the ground in terror.

The blessed Gregory said to him, 'Miserable wretch, carry out the orders of him that sent you. For a trifling reward you planned to kill a simple monk. Is it not a fact that you foolishly came to murder me for three bushels of millet and five goats?' Then that man broke down and implored him, 'Have pity on your murderer, O man of God !' The saint mercifully made the sign of the cross over him, and cured him of the many bodily ailments to which he was subject, and sent him home in good spirits.

When the man told Tskir about all this he became more and more blind with rage. So he assembled the people of Anchi and sent them to destroy Khandzta, where they arrived at dawn. When Tskir had sent this mob to Khandzta he himself went off to Korta to fetch some valuables he had deposited there.

As they were taking a meal on the way he dozed off and had a terrible vision in which his wicked deeds were unmasked, and especially the injuries which he had inflicted on the men of Khandzta. A certain pious priest of Anchi was then with him, and the Lord revealed to this man that an evil end awaited Tskir; so the priest sent a pupil of his to Khandzta to bring advance news of the death of Tskir.

When the pupil arrived he said, 'Do not venture to ruin noble Khandzta, for its destroyer is dead.' Then the people were glad, the fathers entertained them, and they went gaily home glorifying God. As for Tskir, when he reached Korta, he expired on the spot, and they buried him there until the Second Coming of our Lord.

Death of St. Gregory

This blessed man of God, Father Gregory, repository of Christ's will and worker of famous miracles, lived to be exceedingly old, and reached the age of one hundred and two. But the colour of his face never changed nor was his eyesight dimmed: he remained vigorous in body and suffered no infirmity until his death, for he was fortified by the strength of Christ. He was very fond of working, not only in praying and fasting, but also at manual labour, in accordance with Paul's words, 'If any would not work, neither should he eat.' He enjoyed offering hospitality and looking after the poor. He had appointed abbots to look after his various monasteries; if any exceptional problem cropped up, they consulted him about it for the sake of his god-given wisdom.

In the blessed Gregory's heart there arose the desire to take leave of the flesh and depart towards God. The Lord told him that his wish would be fulfilled, as David said, 'He will fulfil the desire of them that fear Him: He also will hear their cry, and will save them.' Then he

instructed the brothers to prepare candles for distribution to all the hermitages in the country round, and told them on what day they were to be lit and prayers offered up for him.

Afterwards he said to the brethren who lived in Khandzta, 'My sons, observe the precepts which you first heard from me for the salvation of your souls, and remember me always. If in the presence of Christ I find courage to speak, then His generous blessings will not cease to shower upon you in this world and the next. When death has parted me from you, remember me always in your prayers and commemorations, and watch over the scene of my earthly pilgrimage. Until the day of judgment, my flesh will turn to dust, but may God receive my spirit.'

While the blessed Gregory was speaking these words he appeared as lit up with the ineffable radiance of Christ; and he rejoiced with supreme happiness, and made the sign of the cross over his monastery, and uttered an everlasting blessing upon his disciples: 'O Christ, our Lord, Thou didst suffer and wast tempted, and art powerful to help those who are sore beset by the wiles of the devil, for Thou art the supporter of Christian folk. O Lord, protect with Thy right hand those who set their hopes upon Thy name, and deliver them from the evil one, and grant them joy eternal. As for me, Thy servant, grant me life in Thy kingdom and remember me mercifully in Thine almighty power.' So he committed his soul to the Lord, and was united with the company of angels.

The death of our blessed Father Gregory occurred in the 81st year of the Paschal Cycle (A.D. 861). His biography was written ninety years after his passing, when 6554 years had elapsed since the Creation¹; Agathon

¹i.e. in A.D. 951. The Georgians counted the beginning of the

was Patriarch in Jerusalem, Michael was Catholicos in Mtskheta, and Ashot Kuropalates, son of King Adarnerse, was prince of the Georgians. This biography of the blessed Gregory was written at Khandzta by Giorgi Merchuli, through the joint zeal of the abbot of Khandzta and his brother John. May Christ write them down in the book of living souls, and show His mercy in full to all believers, that they may appreciate the generosity of God in this world and the next.

In a church one reader is enough, whether there be few listeners or many. In the same way it is enough for one to bless, whether one or many are to be blessed; for inexhaustible are Christ's good gifts to us, and the saints' interceding grace.

world as occurring in the year 5604 B.C., instead of the Greek reckoning of 5508 B.C. The Georgian Paschal Cycle or Koronikon was first used from the year A.D. 780, this being in theory the 13th cycle from the Creation.

CHAPTER 9

THE GEORGIAN ATHONITES

FROM ancient times, hermits and ascetics have dwelt on Mount Athos, that famous peninsula which juts out into the Ægean Sea to the east of Salonica, opposite the island of Lesbos. Since the great monastic foundations were finally established in the 10th century, Athos has been a polyglot community, including, besides the more numerous Greeks, representatives of the other principal nations of Orthodox Christendom. Prominent among these were the Georgians, as is shown by the extracts from the lives of the founders of the Iviron or Georgian monastery on Athos which make up this chapter.

These biographies are important for the evidence they give of the religious, political and cultural links connecting the Georgian Church and state with Byzantium. The joint life of John and his son Euthymius (*c.* 955–1028), composed by their successor, Abbot George the Hagiorite, about the year 1045, gives us valuable data on the great Athanasius the Athonite (*d.* 1000); on the revolt of the feudal magnate Bardas Sclerus and his defeat by the Georgian monk-general John Tornik and the army of the Georgian prince David the Kuropalates; and on the founding of the Iviron monastery on Athos about the year 980. The biography of George the Hagiorite (1009–65), composed about 1070 by his disciple Giorgi the Little, is of special interest for the account of George's dispute with the Patriarch of Antioch concerning the autocephaly or independence of the Georgian Church. The allusions to the apocryphal

mission of the Apostle Andrew to Georgia, and to the legend that the Apostle Simon the Zealot is buried in Abkhazia by the Black Sea, will not fail to attract the attention of Church historians; also of interest is the reference to the consecration of John, bishop of the Goths, at the Georgian Patriarchal Cathedral in Mtskheta during the Iconoclastic period in the 8th century, when 'in all Greece no Orthodox faith was to be found.'

From:—The Life of our Fathers John and Euthymius and Recital of their virtuous works, described by the wretched George, the priest and monk.

Since these blessed fathers of ours were in no way inferior to the eminent saints of olden times, we thought it unseemly to consign their lives to oblivion. Although we are settling down to write these few words some considerable time after their departure towards God, let no one disbelieve us, for we are setting down nothing out of our own head, but only what we have heard from men of faith who knew and served them, men alien to every kind of falsehood and filled with grace abounding.

Our blessed father John chose a life of poverty far from his homeland. God exalted him and made him renowned by all manner of favours, and especially by bestowing on him a beloved son, namely the blessed Euthymius, to be an apostle and give light to the language and the land of the Georgians. As is attested by the memorials inscribed in the books which he translated, Euthymius was instructed by his revered father in all forms of knowledge. The sweetness of the books he translated permeates the entire land, not only of Georgia, but of Greece also, for he rendered from Georgian into Greek Balahvari and Abukura¹ and a number of other works.

¹*The Wisdom of Balahvari* is the Georgian title of the book of

John adopts the monastic vocation

Our blessed father John was a Georgian by birth, of noble parents and distinguished ancestors. He was eminent among the princes of David the Kuropalates [*d.* 1001], strong, vigorous and renowned in battle, tall and handsome in stature, wise in mind and of good counsel, filled with the fear of God and with all manner of good works, and singled out for special affection by David the Kuropalates of pious memory. But since his mind was consumed by the fire of the love of Christ, he put aside the glory of this world and betook himself secretly to the renowned monastery of the Four Churches and was made a monk. By his feats of abstinence he excited the admiration of all the ascetics who dwelt there. But when his works started to become famous, he departed into the land of the Greeks and arrived on Mount Olympus, where he stayed a considerable time at a certain monastery, looking after the mules and performing other humble and menial tasks.

At this point the Greek Emperor bestowed the Upper Lands on David the Kuropalates, while insisting that he should surrender some children of the nobility as sureties. Then John's brothers-in-law handed over his son Euthymius to the Emperor as a hostage, together with other children of the aristocracy. When John heard of this he was obliged willy-nilly to emerge from his retreat and proceed to the imperial capital; and since the emperors were acquainted with John's father-in-law Abuharb, they showed great affection towards John and welcomed him graciously.

Barlaam and Ioasaph, which gives a Christianized version of the life of Buddha, and was highly popular in medieval Europe; Abukura is the Arab Christian apologist Theodore Abu Qurrah, bishop of Harran (*d.* 820), an admirer and imitator of St. John Damascene.

John and Euthymius reach Mount Athos

By God's grace and the Emperors' favour he took his son with him and returned to Olympus. Later he led away his son and a group of disciples and went to Mount Athos, to the Lavra of the great Athanasius, and was made welcome there. He stayed for some two years or more, working in the kitchen and humbly performing all the exercises of monastic discipline.

Adventures of John Tornik, the soldier-monk

At this time the great Tornik had become a monk in his own country. Hearing that John was on Olympus, and having a great affection for him, he set out thither. Since he failed to meet him there, he made confidential enquiries, and learnt that he was on Mount Athos. Without letting the Emperors know, he came secretly to Mount Athos and received John's benediction. There was great rejoicing in the monastery that day, for the great Athanasius was also well aware of Tornik's prowess and valour.

A.D. 976. It was at this juncture that Sclerus rose in revolt and seized the whole of Asia Minor. The Emperors and the Empress Dowager had barricaded themselves in Constantinople, and were in sore straits and dire need. Being in this condition they reflected, 'Apart from David the Kuropalates, we have no hope of aid.' Now as all the roads were barred by Sclerus, nobody could get through; so they were in great perplexity. In this dilemma they heard that John and Tornik were in the Lavra of Athanasius the Great. Without delay they sent an imperial officer to the Lavra with letters from the Emperors: 'The impious Sclerus has deserted us and seized the whole of Asia Minor. Now we implore Your Reverence to ensure by every possible means that John Tornik may come to our royal court.'

This turn of affairs threw Athanasius and John into a state of great embarrassment. In spite of their misgivings they begged Tornik on their knees to appear before the Emperors. But when he heard their beseeching he was very gloomy and said, 'Holy Fathers, since God has made me worthy to wear a monk's garb, I have henceforth no right to appear before the Emperors or before anyone else on this earth.' But they said, 'If now we disobey the Emperors, we shall bring down great wrath upon ourselves and upon this monastery.' In this argument a week went by, until finally Father Athanasius and Father John managed to prevail on him to set forth.

At this period, Basil and Constantine were little more than children, and all business of government was in the hands of the Empress Dowager and the Imperial Chamberlain. When Tornik arrived at the imperial capital, the Chamberlain took him without delay before the Emperors; the Emperors and the Empress rose up and greeted him with reverence and made him sit down by their side. At a word from the Empress, Basil and Constantine cast themselves down at his feet, and the Empress said to him, 'Holy Father, whatever you do for these orphans, may God repay to your soul!' And she implored him: 'Go before the Kuropalates and tell him about all our troubles. I place my trust in God, that you will put the impious Sclerus to flight and rescue us from this dire need.'

Then they wrote letters to the Kuropalates begging for help, and Tornik took leave of the Emperors and by some means or other succeeded in making his way to the presence of the Kuropalates. After deliberating they decided to send a force to Greece and appoint Tornik as its commander. Then the Emperors granted the Upper Lands of Greece to the Kuropalates to hold during his lifetime; to Tornik they wrote, 'We know that God is

your helper. Do not hesitate : with God's aid, take all our foes prisoner and the entire booty shall be yours.'

A.D. 979. Accordingly, the Kuropalates gave Tornik twelve thousand picked horsemen, and by God's grace he put Sclerus to flight and pursued him as far as Persia. In accordance with the Emperors' words he took all the Greek nobles captive and seized their possessions, some of which he distributed among his army and some of which he kept for himself, including very rich booty of gold and silver and brocades and other items. Then he returned to Mount Athos to the Lavra of Athanasius the Great : the fathers greeted him joyfully and embraced him and gave thanks to God who had brought him back in peace.

Building of the Iviron monastery

A.D. 980-83. After this, the fathers took counsel together and said, 'We cannot remain here. We are men of renown, and more Georgians will be joining us.' So they decided to build themselves a separate monastery. They found a beautiful site in the middle of the Holy Mountain and built with much sweat and toil a monastery and churches dedicated to the Holy Virgin and to St. John the Baptist. With their own funds they bought a number of estates and cloisters and hermitages round about the main monastery, stretching as far as the sea, and forming a fair habitation for devout monks. And the god-fearing Emperors confirmed their title to all these things by means of rescripts sealed with gold.

Tornik's last days

After Tornik had put Sclerus to flight and returned here with countless wealth and valuables—amounting to more than twelve hundredweight of treasure, as well as other choice objects—he handed them all over to his

spiritual father John, refusing to keep the smallest thing for himself. When our blessed father John perceived Tornik's great fervency he hastened to ensure that he did not lack for anything, and was accorded due respect and consideration in his old age. But since the great Tornik had been trained as a soldier and was used to army life, he enjoyed chatting and listening to tales about warlike adventures; eminent and respected men used to come and gossip with him about the subjects we have mentioned.

When John observed this he was afraid that some spiritual harm might fall upon this virtuous man. Therefore Father John said to him, 'Beloved brother, I would not wish through excessive forbearance to inflict any harm on your soul. Now refrain from talking about these worldly themes, and from now on chat to nobody but Gabriel the Priest.' After this, he did not even converse with the brethren of the monastery; only if some visitor came from outside he used to exchange a few words with him. So he ended his days in a life of sanctity, and departed towards God (A.D. 984). True were these words concerning him: 'God forgave him his sins, and made him worthy of the life eternal!'

John prostrated with gout, and dies

Soon afterwards John contracted gout and lay for many years prostrated on his bed, suffering great pain. When he became conscious of his enfeebled state, he begged Father Euthymius to take over the administration of the monastery. So long as John lived, Euthymius governed the affairs of the monastery as bursar, under his supervision.

At last our blessed Father John felt his end to be near, and he handed over all his power and authority to Father Euthymius. As the monastery's patrons he nomi-

nated the Greek Emperors and autocrats. After making all his dispositions he bestowed on the blessed Euthymius the supreme benediction ; then committing his pure soul to God, he lay back peacefully in the arms of Euthymius, and fell asleep on the 14th of June, A.D. 1005 ; and he intercedes for the life of our souls.

Fruitful labours of Euthymius

When Father John had brought his son Euthymius from Constantinople he first instructed him in Georgian literature and then gave him a complete Greek education. From his childhood days he possessed a God-given capacity for literary composition. Then his father said to him, 'My son, the land of Georgia suffers from a shortage of books, many of them being wanting there. Now strive to make multiply the talent which God has entrusted to you.' Euthymius, obedient as in all things, set to work without delay and began to translate. Everyone was filled with admiration, for if we except the renderings made in most ancient times, such translations had never appeared in our tongue, nor, in my opinion, will they ever do so again.

Many of his works were sent to David Kuropalates, who was filled with joy, saying, 'Thanks be to God who has now revealed to us a second John Chrysostom !' So the blessed Euthymius went on translating without respite and gave himself no repose ; day and night he distilled the sweet honey of the books of God, with which he adorned our language and our Church. He translated so many divine works that nobody could enumerate them, since he worked at his translations not only on Mount Olympus and Mount Athos (which works we can list in detail), but also in Constantinople, and while travelling, and in all kinds of other places.

Among his translations are the Commentary on the

Gospel according to St. John; the Commentary on the Psalms and Precepts of Basil the Great; the book of St. John Climacus; the book of St. Macarius; the Precepts of St. Maximus Confessor; the book of St. Isaac; the book of St. Dorotheus; the Passion and Miracles of the proto-martyr Demetrius; the Life and Passion of St. Stephen the Younger; the Life and Passion of St. Clement, Pope of Rome; the Life of St. Basil of Cæsarea; the Life and Homilies of St. Gregory the Theologian; the Life of St. Pancras; the sermons of St. Gregory of Nyssa; the Apocalypse of St. John the Divine, with St. Andrew of Crete's Commentary; St. John Damascene's sermon on the Two Natures of Christ, and that on the Birth of the Blessed Virgin; the Life of St. Athanasius the Great; the Life of St. Onuphrius Boscus; the Life of Mary of Egypt; the Precepts of St. Zosimas; the Precepts on Faith by St. Ephraim; the smaller Synaxary for the whole year; the Travels and Preaching of St. John the Evangelist; the Commentary on the Epistles to the Galatians, the Thessalonians and the Romans; the Passion of the Holy Martyr Procopius; the Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Matthew; the Travels and Preaching of the Apostle Andrew; the Nomocanon of John the Faster; the Tenets of the Orthodox Faith; the Passions of St. Febronia, St. Anthimius, St. Blasius, of the Two Thousand, of St. Theodore Stratelates, St. Eustratius and of St. Eustace and his sons; the Precepts of St. Cassian; the Miracles of the Holy Archangels; the Lives of St. Nicholas and of St. Antony the Great.

Thus did Euthymius multiply the talent which had been entrusted to his keeping. In addition, he served for fourteen years as abbot, with three hundred souls to look after, as well as being administrator of the Great Lavra. Most of the affairs of the Holy Mountain were handled

by the blessed Euthymius. In spite of all this, he did not slacken from his excellent work, but unsparingly kept vigil through the night, completing most of his translations by the light of a candle.

Among the Metropolitan Sees, eminent and renowned is the throne of St. Epiphanius of Cyprus. Now during the reign of the Emperor Basil, the archbishop who occupied it came to die. The Emperor vehemently urged the blessed Euthymius to assume the charge of this diocese; but he utterly refused, for he constantly avoided the glory of men and the distractions of the world, and took delight in humility.

Our holy father Euthymius was calm in demeanour, candid and modest in mind; in spirit, he was enlightened and virtuous, in body strong for the service of God, and in stature comely. Without the testimony of Holy Writ he would affirm nothing. He was tireless in attendance at church, where he used to stand without leaning on a staff or against the wall, with his arms crossed upon his chest, like an immovable pillar. His face and eyes were directed down towards the earth. As clothing he wore a hair cloak, and over the cloak a heavy chain. And he kept his purity and chastity spotless, like an angel of God or one who dwells in heaven.

*Euthymius goes to Constantinople and meets with
a fatal accident*

Our holy father Euthymius completed fourteen years service as abbot after the death of his father. Then at the instance of the holy monks, Bishop Arsenius and John Grdzelsdze, he resigned his abbotship; for those worthy monks saw that as a result of his manifold pre-occupations, he was hindered from translating the sacred writings.

But he retained the supervision of the Great Lavra,

and while its monks were obedient, he administered it successfully. At length, however, they began to be insubordinate and run riot, and kept on changing and deposing their priors. Their disorderly conduct got worse and worse, until finally they went to Constantinople to refer their dissensions to the Emperor Constantine.

Knowing that the great Euthymius was their administrator, the Emperor summoned him to the capital to learn the whole truth from him, for he entertained great affection towards Euthymius and had faith in his excellent qualities. So our god-imbued father Euthymius went up to the royal city. When the Emperor heard of his arrival, he greeted him with great reverence and questioned him about the affairs of the Lavra.

Before all this dispute was settled a considerable time went by, and the day of the commemoration of St. John the Evangelist arrived. As was his custom, Euthymius celebrated it with great ceremony, caring for many poor people and providing plentiful good cheer for the monks he had with him. After this he broke his own fast, and took a little rest from his labours. When he got up again, he remembered an icon of St. John the Evangelist which he had ordered from a painter, and told one of his pupils to go and give instructions about its adornment. Then he said, 'I am afraid that you will not be able to explain exactly what we need, my son. You had better saddle my beast, and I will go myself.'

Now this mule, which had just been bought, was ill-tempered, but they did not yet know about its viciousness and recalcitrance. After he had ridden for a short time he came upon a poor man asking for charity; and our holy father stopped to give him alms. Then the beggar got up to receive the offering, all covered in rags as he was. But when the vicious mule saw him it suddenly panicked and bolted, hurtling to this side and that,

with the result that our holy and blessed father suffered severe injuries. When it threw him off, a crowd gathered round him, as he was well known to everyone, and they wept and lamented for him. Then they carried him to the monastery where he was staying.

When the Emperor Constantine heard of this he was very sorrowful and sent one of his personal retainers to ask after him. Likewise the citizens, notables, princes and courtiers, who were faithful in their love for him, all came and embraced him with tears streaming down their cheeks, and then departed. Concerning the Georgians, who can do justice to their anguish? They could not be dragged away from his angelic body, and mourned with many tears their orphaned state.

And so amidst prayers and grace divine, our thrice-blessed and god-imbued father Euthymius passed away, and great grief overcame us who were deprived of our kind and adored father. But he departed and came into the presence of God's ineffable light, in company with all the saints who have made themselves pleasing in God's sight from time immemorial; and he intercedes for our souls before the Holy Trinity. Our Father Euthymius died on the 13th of May, a Monday, in the eleventh Indiction, the year 6536 from the Creation of the World (A.D. 1028), to the glory of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, to whom belong honour and glory now and always, for ever and ever, Amen.

From:—The Life and Acts of our Holy and Blessed Father, George the Athonite

Disputation between George the Athonite and the Patriarch of Antioch, concerning the autonomy of the Georgian Church

Certain men, filled with the spirit of deceit and in-

trigue, approached the Patriarch¹ and remarked to him, 'How is it, Sovereign Lord, that the churches and prelates of Georgia are not placed under the authority of any patriarch, that their entire Church organization is decreed by themselves alone, and that they consecrate their own Catholicos and bishops? Surely this is unseemly, as not one of the Twelve Apostles visited their land; for this reason, they ought to submit to the authority of this godly city and apostolic see, since they are an ignorant people and a flock few in number and situated near us. They ought to be brought into the pastoral fold of the Patriarchs of Antioch, and their Catholicos should be consecrated here, so that we may be one flock with one shepherd.'

In hatching these plots and making these affirmations they were counting on our lack of wit. But as it happened the affair took a very different turn. The Patriarch began to address the monk, George the Athonite, in the same terms which we have reported above, speaking in tones partly wheedling and partly grave:—

'Although you are by birth a Georgian, Reverend Father, still you are my equal in science and learning. Now it is fitting that your churches and prelates should be under the jurisdiction of this apostolic see. This is also justified by their geographical nearness. This can be effected by you, because I know that your king will pay heed if you write to him and persuade him to adopt this best course of action. But if he will not listen to you, then I shall write to the four patriarchs my colleagues and inform them of the insubordination and pig-headedness of your nation, and how, disregarding the apostolic canon, they govern themselves, in spite of the fact that none of the Apostles visited their country. In this way I shall

¹The Patriarch Theodosius III of Antioch. This dispute must have taken place about the year 1055.

cause you a great deal of trouble, until in the end your king will appear in person before us to submit to our dominion !’

After the Patriarch had addressed these and similar words to the monk, the blessed George mildly and calmly spoke to the Patriarch as follows :—

‘Most Reverend Lord, how is it that you have so lightly undertaken the conception and execution of so great and lofty a matter? Who are these ignorant advisers of yours, and why have they led you to regard the upright and innocent Georgian nation as witless boors? Behold, even I, the humblest of all my brethren, will provide them all with something in the way of an answer. Have them bring the book of the Travels of Andrew the Apostle, and there you will find what you seek.’

Then the Patriarch told Theophilus—a Georgian by birth, who later became Metropolitan of Tarsus—to bring this book. After they had brought it, before beginning to read it, the monk said to the Patriarch :—

‘Most Reverend Lord, your words are : I sit upon the throne of Peter, chief of the Apostles. But we are the heirs and the flock of him who was first called—that is, Andrew—and who called his brother; by him we were converted and enlightened. What is more, one of the twelve Holy Apostles, namely Simon the Canaanite, is buried in our land, in Abkhazia, at the place which is called Nicopsia. Through these holy Apostles we received the light; and since we came to know the One God, we have never renounced Him, nor has our nation ever turned aside into heretical ways, but we curse and anathematize all apostates and renegades. We stand firmly based on this foundation of orthodoxy and on the precepts which were proclaimed by those holy Apostles. Now do you consider that we should submit to you?’

Then he added, addressing the Patriarch in jesting

fashion, 'Reverend Lord, it is also fitting that he who is called should submit to him who calls him ; so that it behoves Peter to submit to Andrew his brother, who called him---likewise it behoves you to submit to us!'

And he added, 'Reverend Lord, however ignorant and frivolous you may consider us, and however wise and weighty you may deem yourself, yet there was a time when in all Greece no orthodox faith was to be found. And John, Bishop of the Goths, was consecrated bishop in Mtskheta, as it is written in the Great Synaxary!'¹

When the blessed George had finished speaking, the Patriarch and all his bishops were amazed at the acumen of his mind and the way in which the words of holy writ flowed from his mouth like a river undammed. The Patriarch smilingly said to the prelates and people, 'You see how this monk by himself has got the better of us all! We must be careful not to have him as an adversary, for fear that he should worst us in both word and deed, bring us under his heel and turn us into his own parish!' From that day onwards, the Patriarch and all the people of Antioch took a liking to him, as a spiritual father and guide. The Patriarch started to consult him about confidential problems, and treated the holy monk with great respect and generosity as long as he stayed in the land of Antioch.

¹Mtskheta, the Patriarchal Cathedral of Georgia ; this happened in the 8th century during the Iconoclastic period.

CHAPTER 10

THE PASSION OF QUEEN KETEVAN

DURING the six centuries which elapsed between the lifetime of the great Georgian Athonites and that of the tragic Queen Ketevan, the kingdom of Georgia underwent great vicissitudes. At the time of the Crusades the inspiring leadership of King David the Builder (1089-1125) and Queen Tamar (1184-1213) enabled the country to emerge as leader of a pan-Caucasian Christian empire. But the Mongol invasions of the 1230's, and the later campaigns of Tamerlane, brought all this achievement down in ruins. The fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453 cut off Georgia from Western Christendom, and left her a prey to the rising Muhammadan powers, Ottoman Turkey and Safavi Iran.

Early in the 17th century, Shah 'Abbas the Great of Persia embarked on a series of campaigns to subjugate Eastern Georgia. He was helped by the defection of Giorgi Saakadze, a prominent general in the service of the young Georgian monarch, Luarsab of Kartli. Saakadze guided the Shah's armies, which vented their fury on Eastern Georgia; churches were devastated, icons and crosses broken up and the jewels given for ornaments to the Shah's concubines. Many people saved themselves by fleeing to the woods and mountain strongholds, but at least sixty thousand were massacred. The rest of the population was deported to remote parts of Persia. To quote Pietro della Valle, a contemporary Italian observer:—

'Today Persia proper, Kirman or Carmania, Mazanderan on the Caspian Sea and many other lands of this empire are all full of Georgian and Circassian inhabitants. Most of them remain Christian to this day, but in a very crude manner, since they have neither priest nor minister to tend them. . . . There is no grandee who does not want all his wives to be Georgian, because it is a very handsome race, and the king himself has his palace full of them. . . . It would be too long to narrate all that has passed in this miserable migration, how many murders, how many deaths caused by privation, how many seductions, rapes and acts of violence, how many children drowned by their own parents or cast into rivers through despair, some snatched by force from their mother's breasts because they seemed too weak to live and thrown down by the wayside and abandoned there to be food for wild beasts or trampled underfoot by the horses and camels of the army, which marched for a whole day on top of dead bodies ; how many sons separated from their fathers, wives from their husbands, sisters from their brothers, and carried off to distant countries without hope of ever meeting again. Throughout the camp, men and women were sold on this occasion much cheaper than beasts, because of the great number of them.'

King Luarsab of Kartli was sufficiently trusting to accept the Shah's offer of peace negotiations ; on arriving in the Persian camp he was arrested, and later strangled near Shiraz. The other ruler of Eastern Georgia, Teimuraz I of Kakheti, preferred resistance, and allied himself alternately with the Russians and the Turks to carry on guerilla warfare.

In revenge, Shah 'Abbas castrated the two young sons of Teimuraz whom he already held as hostages. To the mother of Teimuraz, the Queen Dowager Ketevan, whom he also held in his power, he offered the chance

of adopting Islam and entering his harem. On her refusal, she was cruelly martyred at Shiraz on September 22nd, 1624. The following account of her Passion is translated from a contemporary report from the Augustinian missionary fathers in Persia addressed to the Papal See; the original text was first published in 1910 by the late Father Michael Tamarati.

From a report of the Augustinian Fathers in
Persia : Passion of Queen Ketevan

After Queen Ketevan was conducted to Shiraz, Brother Ambrose, who was then in that town, entered into contact with her and also with all the members of her household, who numbered about forty. They used to come to Mass at Brother Ambrose's church, and showed a great leaning towards the Catholic religion. Queen Ketevan sent to tell Brother Ambrose that she wished him to confess all her retinue during Lent; on the day of his patron saint, St. Augustine, she sent him from her chapel and oratory some pictures, candlesticks and carpets to adorn the church, as well as one of her men who could model wax, to make candles and tapers.

While Brother Ambrose was entertaining great hopes of harvesting the fruit of his fatigues through the conversion of these persons, the King of Persia sent certain of his minions to Shiraz; they were instructed to tell the Georgian queen in his name to become a Muhammadan, and that he would take her as his wife and give her great riches. If she refused, they were to put her to death with great torments. The queen replied that nothing on earth would make her abandon the faith of her Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ, nor her chastity, which she valued more than all the treasures in the world. The officials begged her again not to expose herself to suffer such tortures, and to have pity on her tender flesh; but

nothing could shake her constancy. When they saw this, the officials, after striving in vain to persuade her, told her to prepare to suffer the torments, and she asked for permission to say her prayers. This being granted, she entered her chapel, went down on her knees and prayed our Lord God to accord her His grace, to give her strength to suffer all these tortures for His holy faith.

When she had committed herself to God's keeping she went out and told the minions that they might do what the king had commanded. The officials begged her afresh to have pity on herself a weak woman, and not to condemn herself to so miserable a death. The queen replied that they might give up trying to persuade her, for it was time wasted. The officials had already lit a great fire and inserted iron pincers into it, which were now as hot as the fire itself. They stripped the queen from her neck to her waist, and taking the red-hot pincers, they tore away the flesh from her delicate body with great cruelty, until at last the queen fell half dead to the ground, though continuing to invoke our Lord God with the greatest courage and fortitude. When she had fallen to the ground, they picked up the whole brazier and threw it on her body, and finally put her to death by strangling her with a bowstring.

It is to be believed that this queen is partaking of God's glory in heaven, for although she belonged to the Greek rite, she was most cordially disposed towards the Holy Catholic Church and to all the Latins, showing them every mark of affection and helping them as much as she could. She lived on such good terms with us that it is impossible to believe that she was ill-disposed to the Holy Catholic Church. A rumour was current among the people of her country that her tomb was enveloped in an aura of shining light.

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INDEX

- 'Abbas the Great, Shah of Persia, 169-72
 Abdulla al-Mansur, caliph, 116
 Abiathar, the Priest, 25, 34
 Abibos of Nekresi, St., 37
 Abkhazia, 13, 119-21, 155, 167
 Abo of Tiflis, St., 11, 115-34
 Abraham, the Hermit, 79
 Abraham, the Patriarch, 103, 117, 138
 Abu Qurrah, Theodore, 155-6
 Abuharb, 156
 Adarnerse, Kuropalates, 116
 Adarnerse, prince, 142, 146
 Adarnerse II, king of Georgia, 153
 Aderc, king of Georgia, 26-7
 Adsqr, 148
 Aegean Sea, 154
 Agathangelos, 14
 Agathon, Patriarch of Jerusalem, 153-4
 Alans, 118
 Albania, Caucasian, 82
 Albina, 64
 Alexandria, 71-3
 Ambrose, Brother, 171
 Anastasius I, Byzantine emperor, 82
 Anchi, 149-50
 Andrew, prior of Opiza, 138
 Andrew, St. and Apostle, 155, 162, 167-8
 Andrew of Crete, St., 162
 Andrew the monk, 78
 Annas the High-Priest, 26
 Anthimius, St., 162
 Antioch, 60, 83, 154, 165-8
 Antony, St., 120, 162
 Aphots, bishop, 47, 51, 56
 Apsarea, 120
 Arabia, Arabs, 74, 115-17, 134-5
 Aragi, river, 35
 Arcadius, Byzantine emperor, 59
 Archilios, king of Georgia, 59
 Armazael, king of Georgia, 27
 Armazi, 22-3
 Armenia, Armenians, 13-14, 21-2, 38, 44-5, 57, 61, 82, 88, 116, 148
 Arsenius, bishop, 163
 Arsenius I, Catholicos of Georgia, 148
 Arsenius II, Catholicos of Georgia, 81
 Arshakids, 95-6, 101
 Arshusha, father of Varsken, 45
 Arshusha, Pitiakhsh of Georgia, 99
 Artanuj, 134, 143
 Arvand Gushnasp, 95-9
 Ascalon, 74, 78-9
 Ascension, church of the, 64
 Ashot the Great, Kuropalates, 134-5, 141-6, 149
 Ashot II, Kuropalates, 153
 Asia Minor, 64, 157
 Assyria, Assyrians, 11, 83, 101
 Athanasius the Athonite, St., 154, 157-9
 Athanasius the Great, St., 162
 Athos, Mount, 40, 154-69
 Athribis, 79
 Augustine, St., 171
 Augustinian missionaries, 171-2
 Azotus, 77
 Baaru, 75
 Babylon, 103, 116-17
 Bacurius (Bakur), 14, 19, 59
 Baedeker, 135
 Baghdad, 115-17
 Bagrat I, Kuropalates, 142, 146-8
 Bagratid dynasty, 134-5, 141
 Bakar, king of Georgia, 38-9
 Bakhdiad, Persian Christian, 97-100
 Bakurdukhtia, 59
 Balahvari, 155-6

- Bardas Sclerus, 154, 157-9
 Barlaam and Ioasaph, 156
 Barnabas, 63
 Basil the Deacon, 60
 Basil the Great, St., 78, 162
 Basil II, Byzantine emperor, 158, 163
 Berlin, 94
 Beth Daltha, 76
 Bethany, 107
 Bethlehem, 20
 Bichvinta, 13
 Black Sea, 11, 119-20, 155
 Blasius, St., 162
 Bodbe, 25, 35-8
 Bomisparia, 59
 Borzo, Persian Christian, 97-8
 Bosmarios, father of Peter the Iberian, 59
 Bosmarios, king of Georgia, 59
 Bosphorus, 64
 Buddha, 156
 Byzantium, 57, 82, 115-16, 134, 154

 Caesarea, 74
 Caiaphas the High-Priest, 71
 Caliphs, 115-16, 121-2, 134
 Canaan, 103
 Cappadocia, 19-20
 Caspi, 29, 35
 Caspian Sea, 11, 44, 53, 170
 Cassian, John, 162
 Caucasus, 11, 33, 39, 45, 53, 82, 118, 169
 Cavern's Head, mountain, 35
 Chalcedon, Council of, 12, 57-8, 65, 68-9, 76, 78, 82
 Chaldaea, Chaldees, 103, 117
 Chor, 53-4
 Chorokh, river, 135
 Christopher, abbot, 138
 Chrysostom, St. John, 161
 Circassians, 170
 Colastra, 19
 Colchis, 13
 Commandments, the Ten, 94, 103-4
 Constantine the Great, 12-14, 19, 30, 32-3, 38
 Constantine VI, Byzantine emperor, 122
 Constantine VIII, Byzantine emperor, 158, 164-5
 Constantinople, 61-6, 115, 120, 122, 145, 157, 161-4, 169
 Copts, 57
 Cosmas, St., 56
 Cosmas the Chamberlain, 76
 Crusades, Crusaders, 11, 169
 Ctesiphon, 45
 Cyprus, 163
 Cyril, St., Patriarch of Alexandria, 65

 Damian, St., 56
 Daniel the Prophet, 60, 87
 Dapanchuli family, 141
 Dari-Alan (Daniel Pass), 118
 David, king of Israel, 25, 104, 133, 135, 137, 142, 151
 David, tower of, 66
 David of Garesja, St., 81-93
 David Kuropalates, 154-61
 David II, king of Georgia, 169
 della Valle, Pietro, 169
 Demetrius, St. and Martyr, 162
 Derbent, 44, 53
 Diatessaron, 94
 Diocletian, Roman emperor, 14, 21
 Dionysius the Areopagite, 58
 Dionysius, military officer, 73
 Dionysius the Scholastic, 76
 Dioscorus, Patriarch of Alexandria, 69-71
 Dodo, Father, 88-90
 Dorotheus, St., 162
 Dungeon, prison at Tiflis, 131
 Dvin, Council of, 82

 Edessa, 81
 Egypt, 11, 65, 69-73
 Elias, Patriarch of Jerusalem, 81, 91-2
 Elias the Tribune, 77
 Elioz the Priest, 26, 32
 Ephesus, 20-1
 Ephraim, bishop of Adsqur, 148
 Ephraim the Syrian, St., 162
 Epiphanius, St., 163
 Erusheti, 33
 Eudocia, empress, 57, 60, 65, 67, 77
 Eudoxia, empress, 59

- Euphrates, river, 103
 Euphrosynus the Monk, 78-9
 Eusebius, bishop of Pelusium, 72
 Eustace, St. and Martyr, 162
 Eustace of Mtskheta, St., 94-115
 Eustratius, St., 162
 Euthymius the Athonite, St., 154-65

 Febronia, St., 162
 Fevronia, abbess, 144
 Forty Martyrs, *see* Sebastia
 Four Churches, monastery of the, 156
 Francis of Assisi, St., 81
 Franks, 20

 Gabriel Dapanchuli, 141-2
 Gabriel the Priest, 160
 Gaiane, 21-2
 Gaim, 24
 Galilee, 109
 Gandzak, 96-7, 101
 Garesja, 81-93
 Gatsi, 24
 Gaza, 57, 67-9, 74, 76, 79
 George, prior of Opiza, 138-9
 George, St. and Martyr, 11-12, 19
 George the Hagiorite, St., 154-55, 165-8
 Gerontius, abbot, 65
 Ghado mountains, 142
 Giorgi Merchuli, 135, 153
 Giorgi the Little, 154
 Gog and Magog, 11, 118
 Golgotha, 64
 Goths, 155, 168
 Grdzelisidze, John, 163
 Greece, Greeks, 30, 116, 120, 145-6, 153-61, 168, 172
 Gregorian doctrine, 82
 Gregory of Khandzta, St., 134-53
 Gregory, Father, 79
 Gregory, Mamasakhlisi of Georgia, 99
 Gregory of Nyssa, St., 162
 Gregory the Illuminator, St., 13-14

 Gregory the Theologian, St., 162
 Guararn, prince, 142, 146
 Gurgen, Prince of Georgia, 121-2
 Gushnak, Persian Christian, 97-8
 Gvirobandak, *see* Eustace of Mtskheta

 Hagar, 117
 Haran, 103
 Harnack, A. von, 94, 116
 Hebrew, 23, 25
 Hebron, 103
 Helena, empress, 30-3, 37
Henoticon, 76
 Heraclius, Byzantine emperor, 115
 Hereti, 38, 46, 53
 Herod, king of Israel, 25
 Hilarion the Ascetic, 76
 Hill of Mercy, 91
 Honigmann, E., 57
 Huns, 44, 51, 59

 Iberia, Iberians, 11-15, 44, 57-80
 Iberians, abbey of the, 66
 Iconoclasts, 155, 168
 Iese of Tsilkani, St., 83
 Imnaishvili, I. V., 95
 Ioasaph, 156
 Ionians, *see* Greeks
 Iran, Iranians, *see* Persia
 Irenaeus, Father, 68
 Isaac, St., 162
 Isaac, the Patriarch, 103
 Isaiah the Egyptian, 76, 80
 Ishkhan, 138, 146-8
 Ishmael, 117
 Islam, 115, 171
 Iviron Monastery, 154, 159-60

 Jacob the Patriarch, 103
 Jacob the Priest, 37
 Jacob of Tsurtav, 44, 47-56
 Javakheti, 22
 Jerusalem, 11, 14, 19-20, 25-6, 64-70, 74, 77, 91, 105, 108, 115, 145-8
 Jews, 15, 23-6, 34, 101-10, 116
 John, Bishop, 32-7

- John, bishop of the Goths, 155, 168
 John, bishop of Tsurtav, 50, 55
 John, son of Saban, 115-16
 John Climacus, St., 162
 John Damascene, St., 156, 162
 John of Khandzta, 153
 John Rufus, 58
 John the Athonite, St., 154-61
 John the Baptist, St., 41, 105, 126-7, 136, 138, 159
 John the Eunuch, 63-8, 77, 79
 John the Evangelist, St., 162, 164
 John the Qanopite, 78
 John Zedazneli, St., 83
 Jojik, 48-55
 Jordan, river, 41, 105, 126
 Joseph, St., 108
 Judas Iscariot, 69, 71
 Justin I, Byzantine emperor, 82
 Justinian, Byzantine emperor, 82
 Juvenal, Patriarch of Jerusalem, 14, 20-1, 57, 68-9

 Kaisarion church, 72-3
 Kakheti, 35-8, 86, 170
 Karsani, 26
 Kartli, 169-70
 Kefr-Searta, 68
 Ketevan, Queen, St. and Martyr, 169-72
 Khaldia, 120
 Khandzta, 134-53
 Khaqan of Khazaria, 116-19
 Khazaria, Khazars, 116-19
 Khoba, 25
 Khuedios the Hermit, 139-40
 Khusrau Anushirvan, king of Iran, 81, 94-5
 Kirman, 170
 Klarjeti, 134-5, 140, 149
 Kodi Spring, 25
 Kola, 40-4
 Korta, 150-1
 Ksani, river, 83
 Kura, river, 25, 32, 40-1, 131
 Kuropalates, 116, 134, 141-9, 153-9
 Kviriketi, 138
 Kyrion, Catholicos of Georgia, 82

 Lazarus, 107
 Lazarus of Pharp, 45
 Lazica, 13, 63
 Lebanon, cedar of, 27, 31
 Legion, devil called, 107
 Leo I, St., Pope, 69, 78
 Leo I, Byzantine emperor, 73
 Leo IV, Byzantine emperor, 122
 Lesbos, 154
 Licinius, Roman emperor, 61
 Livias, 74
 Living Pillar of Mtskheta, 31-2, 37-9
 Longinos, 26
 Luarsab, king of Georgia, 169-70
 Lucian of Garesja, 84-7, 91

 Macarius, St., 162
 Madeba, 75
 Magdal Tutha, 76
 Magi, Magians, 23-7, 32, 95-7, 101
 al-Mahdi, Muhammad, caliph, 116-17, 121-2
 Mamasakhlisi, 99
 Mamelukes, 11
 Manglisi, 33
 Marcian, Byzantine emperor, 70-2, 82
 Maria, church of, 61
 Marr, N. Y., 40, 135
 Mary Magdalene, 109
 Mary of Egypt, 162
 Marzapans of Georgia, 95-113
 Matthew the Evangelist, St., 162
 Maximian, Roman emperor, 19-20
 Maximus Confessor, St., 162
 Mayuma, 57, 67-70, 74, 79
 Mazanderan, 170
 Mazdeism, 45, 54
 Medes, 11
 Melania the Younger, St., 57, 64-7
 Mere, convent of, 144
 Mesopotamia, 83, 103
 Michael the Archangel, 28
 Michael IV, Catholicos of Georgia, 153
 Mirian, king of Georgia, 19, 23, 28-39

- Mithradates, *see* John the Eunuch
 Mitylene, 58
 Mongols, 169
 Monophysites, 57-8, 68, 76, 82
 Moses of Khorene, 14
 Moses of Oxyrynchos, 72
 Moses the Prophet, 26, 74-5, 104
 Mousa, caliph, 122
 Mtskheta, 22-6, 30, 32, 36-8, 44, 83, 95-6, 99-101, 111-14, 148, 153-5, 168
 Muhammad, caliph, *see* al-Mahdi
 Muhammad the Prophet, 118, 123-4
 Mukhran, 29
 Nabarnugios, *see* Peter the Iberian
 Nana, queen of Georgia, 23, 27-30, 37-9
 Nedzvi, 138
 Nekresi, 37
 Nerses, Catholicos of Armenia, 148
 Nerses, Duke of Georgia, 116-22, 134-6
 Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople, 57, 61, 69
 Nicaea, Council of, 12-13
 Nicholas, St., 162
 Nicopsia, 120, 167
 Nimrod, 28-9
 Nino, St., 13-40, 81
 Olives, Mount of, 64-5
 Olympus, Mount, 156-7, 161
 Onuphrius Boscus, St., 162
 Opiza, 138-40
 Osdukhia, 59
 Ossetes, 118
 Oxyrynchos, 72
 Palestine, 19, 57, 69-71, 74
 Panagushnasp, Persian Christian, 97-100
 Pancras, St., 162
 Paravani, Lake, 22
 Paul, bishop of Mayuma, 68
 Paul, St., 58, 63, 73, 113, 135, 151, 162
 Pelaea, 74
 Pelusium, 72
 Peroz, king of Iran, 44-5
 Peroz, prince, 36
 Perozak, Persian Christian, 97-8
 Persia, Persians, 11, 25-6, 32, 36, 44-7, 50, 54, 58-60, 65, 94-103, 115, 159, 169-72
 Peter, bishop of Alexandria, St. and Martyr, 80
 Peter the Apostle, St., 58, 62, 135, 167-8
 Peter the Iberian, 57-80, 82
 Pharasmanios, 59
 Phoenicia, 76
 Pinianus, 64
 Place of Lamentation, 131
 Pontus, 15
 Procopius, St. and Martyr, 162
 Proterius, Patriarch of Alexandria, 57, 71-3
 Qubaneishvili, S., 95
 Resurrection, church of the, 64
 Rev, prince of Georgia, 28, 34, 37-9
 Ripsime, 14, 21-2
 Roman Catholic Church, 171-2
 Roman Empire, Romans, 13, 19-20, 28-9, 58-61, 64, 66
 Rufinus, Tyrannius, 15-19
 Russia, 170
 Rustavi, 88
 Saakadze, Giorgi, 169
 Saba, bishop of Ishkhan, 138, 145-8
 Safavi dynasty, 169
 Sahak, son of Ismail, 149
 Salome of Ujarma, 19, 36-7
 Salonica, 154
 Samtskhe, 148
 Samuel, 6th century Catholicos, 99, 112-14
 Samuel, 8th century Catholicos, 116, 122
 Samuel, archdeacon, 94, 102, 110
 Samuel, bishop, 50, 55
 Samuel, prior of Opiza, 138
 Samuel the Prophet, 136
 Saracens, 11, 116-24, 132, 147
 Sarah of Bethlehem, 20
 Sasanian dynasty, 94

- Savva, St., 145-6
 Schultze, K., 116
 Sclerus, *see* Bardas
 Sebastia, 40 Martyrs of, 61,
 65, 130
 Shatberd, 142-3
 Shavsheti, 140
 Shio, St., 83
 Shiraz, 170-2
 Shushanik, St., 44-56
 Sidonia, 25
 Silvanus, 67
 Simeon Stylites the Younger,
 St., 81
 Simon the Zealot, St., 155, 167
 Sinai, Mount, 103
 Sion, Mount, 64, 66
 Socrates of Constantinople, 14
 Sokha, 70
 Solomon, king of Israel, 104,
 108, 127, 136-7
 Sophronius, Patriarch of Jeru-
 salem, St., 57
 Stephen, Duke of Georgia,
 121-3
 Stephen, Persian Christian, 97-
 101, 113-14
 Stephen, St. and Martyr, 65,
 125
 Stephen the Younger, St., 162
 Susanna, 20
 Syria, Syriac, 57-8, 82
 Syrian Fathers, 81-3

 Tabor, Mount, 109
 Tamar, queen of Georgia, 169
 Tamarati, M., 171
 Tamerlane, 169
 Tao, 134, 140, 146
 Tarsus, 167
 Tartars, 11
 Tatian, 94
 Tbeti, 149
 Teimuraz I, king of Georgia,
 170
 Thebaid, 72
 Theodore, abbot, 138
 Theodore of Ascalon, 78
 Theodore Stratelates, St., 162
 Theodosius, anti-Patriarch of
 Jerusalem, 69-71
 Theodosius II, Byzantine em-
 peror, 57-60, 63, 67
 Theodosius III, Patriarch of
 Antioch, 154, 165-8
 Theophilus, Metropolitan of
 Tarsus, 167
 Tiflis, 95-101, 113-16, 122-3,
 149
 Timothy the Cat, 57, 72-3
 Tiridates, king of Armenia, 14,
 21-2, 38
 Tkhoti, Mount, 29, 35-6
 Tome, of Pope Leo, 69, 78
 Tornik, John, 154, 157-60
 Trebizond, 13, 120
 Tsilkani, 83
 Tskir, bishop of Anchi, 149-51
 Tsoben, 36
 Tsurtav, 44, 46
 Tsutso, 59
 Turkey, Turkish, 116, 169-70

 Ujarma, 19, 36-7
 al-'Umarī, 11
 Uplis-tsikhe, 29
 Urbnisi, 23
 Urdi, 55

 Vardan Mamikonian, 44-5
 Varden, 45
 Varsken, the Pitiakhsh, 44-54
 Vezhan Buzmir, 100-13
 Victor, St., 68
 Vitry, Jacques de, 11
 Volga, river, 116, 119

 Wakhtang Gorgaslan, 45
 Wardrop, Marjory, 15
 Wardrop, Oliver, 15
 Wistam, Iranian commandant,
 96-7

 Yamnia, 77
 Yezdegird, king of Iran, 44

 Zabulon, 19-20
 Zacharias, bishop of Anchi, 149
 Zacharias Rhetor, 58
 Zacharias the Monk, 78
 Zaden, 22
 Zarmil, Persian Christian, 97-8
 Zeno, Byzantine emperor, 76,
 82
 Zeno the Hermit, 67-9
 Zoroaster, 44
 Zosimas, St., 162